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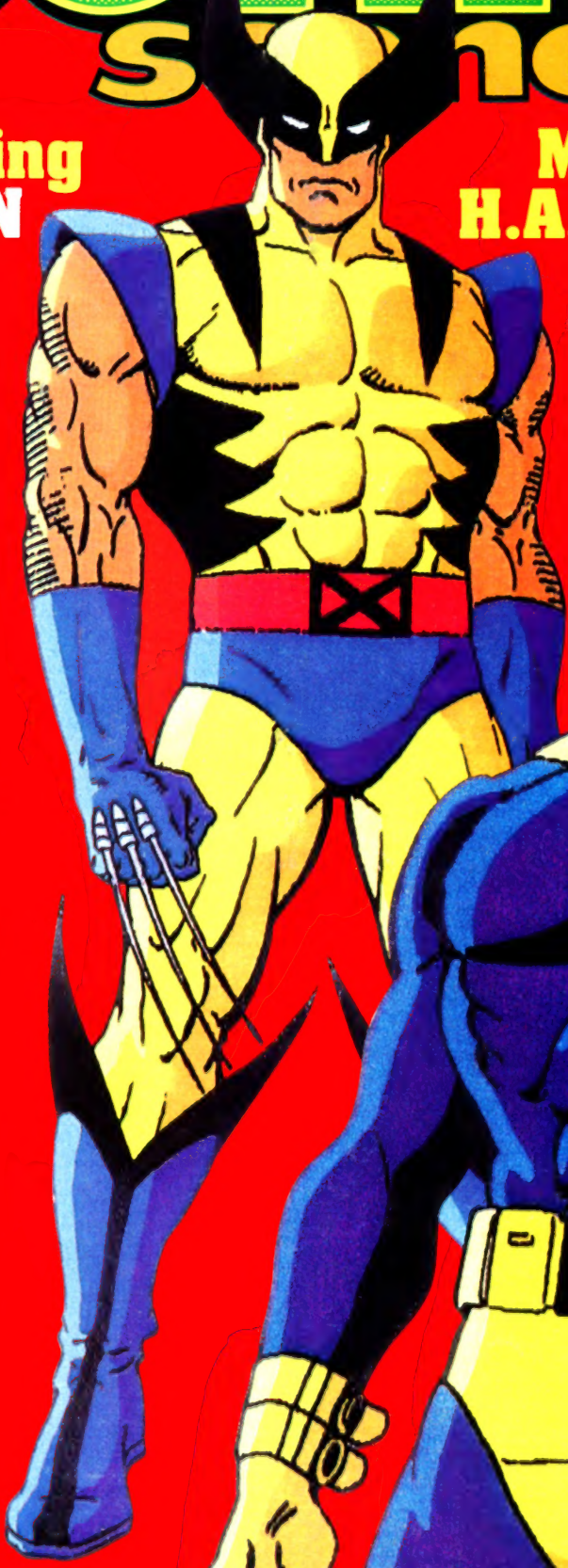

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And to think, just moments ago, you paid (alas) $4.95 for it. Let's talk immediate investment return! Or at least that's the kind of thinking now applied to comics. Minutes after certain titles hit the shelves, they're already "worth" more. They're hot, hot, hot. Gotta buy them and bag 'em and keep 'em safe. Gotta put 'em away far from light and dust and acid. They're worth *money*.

When did *this* happen? When did ownership become more important than enjoyment? When did plasticizing *X-Acto Man*, *The Human Blade* become the thing to do? Reading the book, isn't *that* the point?

I always thought so. Who should we credit for this ever-encroaching shadow of pure greed? Certainly not the creators—whether hot or not, it's their job, their love, their life to create comics. For more than 50 years, they've done comics, not for the money (small), the benefits (minimal) or the fame (minor), but because they *wanted* to do comics. Now at least, some creators are receiving the rights and rewards all creators deserved. That's a triumph, unevenly dispersed though the laurels may be.

Then, it must be the comics companies, right? Publishers are in it for the money. Doesn't that explain multiple editions, fluorescent/metallic/die-cut covers, plastic baggings, trading cards, contests, poster inserts, holograms, 3-D glasses, Smell-O-Vision and all the rest? Sure, they're sales gimmicks. Something of real (or perceived) value has been added to *X-Acto Man*—a genuine imitation, ultra-violet razor blade—to cut through the comic shelf clutter, gain your attention and make a sale.

Nothing wrong with that. Such marketing and promotion techniques get new and old comics sampled by reluctant readers. Each gimmick only works briefly, though. Who wouldn't want a free, genuine imitation razor blade? But *if* you then read that *X-Acto Man* (and don't like it), a legion of glow-in-the-dark gimmicks won't get you to buy the next issue—unless that's all you want, the style without the substance, all sizzle, no steak.

Who can blame publishers? I don't. In my experience, their main goal is to do well enough to keep publishing. Profits, that would be nice; they'll pay for losses elsewhere. Publish or perish or at least break even. Yes, I'm brutally simplifying the business plans of some very public companies, but unless a firm's being sold or getting out of the field entirely, that's the bottom line: Make enough bucks publishing to publish some more. And all that marketing schtick furthers the goal.

That only leaves the comics shop dealers. Could they be at fault, comics pushers preying on impressionable fans? Naahh, you can lead a fan to the racks, but you can't make him buy—especially what he doesn't wish to buy. These dealers have always only fielded our wants and demands, providing a convenient place, say, to buy those *X-Acto Man* back issues we just had to have. Although dealers offer the "investment opportunities," they aren't to blame for this Wall Street-instant price guide attitude.

So, who's responsible? Why are comics becoming more investment than entertainment? Pogo knew: "We have met the enemy and he is us."

It's our fault. You. And you. And me. Every time we buy a comic not to enjoy, but just to put in some plastic preserver. Every time we're seduced by a sales gimmick, but don't bother to read what we've bought.

Sure, comics are worth something. They always have been, for more than 50 years. They're worth reading...and sharing with friends...and collecting so you can read 'em again or trade 'em or give 'em away or even, if you have to, sell a few to pay some bills.

But, if we look at this wonderful hobby of ours as only (or mostly) investment, we're lost. We'll become the vacant-eyed baseball card collectors who don't even like the sport but buy the cards. The cold-blooded autograph hounds who nab the stars and sell their names. Or the soulless Wall Street speculators looking for the next big score.

Comics are supposed to be fun. Their value to you and me is what we'll give for a moment's laughter with *Li'l Abner*, some high adventure from *Challengers of the Unknown*, the magic of *Dr. Strange*, even the cutting-edge suspense of *X-Acto Man*.

As we've always done, for more than 50 years, let's buy comics. But, let's buy them to *read*.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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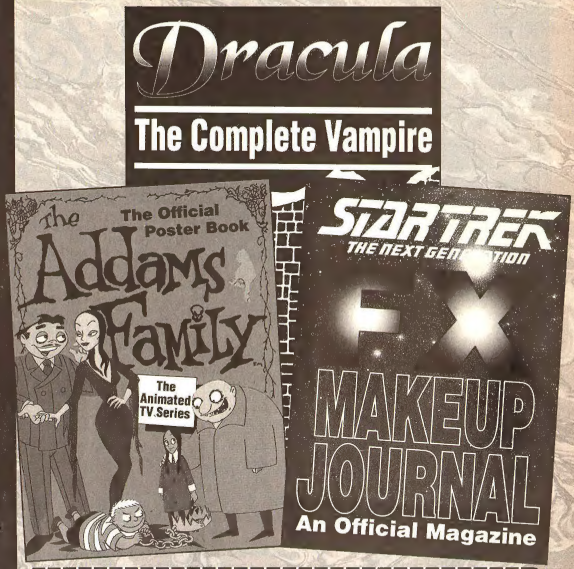

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...Having read the editorial of COMICS SCENE #25, I have come to a disturbing conclusion: Comics collecting is no longer a fun hobby. I remember the days when I could go to a friend's house and trade three or four *Avengers* for three or four *Superman* books. There would be no discussion over whether or not *Avengers* #107-111 cost more than *Superman* #176-180. If anything, one of us would throw in some baseball cards to sweeten the deal.

Picture the same situation today. Kids rarely trade books. They want the money. So, instead of going to Tommy's house down the block, they'll go to a dealer. Face it, gentlemen, these are different times and the hobby of collecting has changed.

Some of the change in comics is the fault of the companies. Witness the pre-bagged, glowing, explode-when-you-open-them sales gimmicks. They have artificially created a collectable by making the books a little different. In the past, collectability rested on the story or the period of time in which they were released. Now, it's the packaging that makes it special.

The sad thing is that the kids are gobbling it all up at an alarming rate. What worries me is *not* the consumption, but the actual reason for the purchases. For example, while making weekly purchases at my local comics shop, I asked 20 young people what drove them to purchase their books. Thirteen of them who had purchased copies of *Nomad* #1, *X-Men, Wolverine, X-Force, X-Factor* and *Punisher War Zone* stated that they heard from friends that in the back issue market, these titles would bring a large profit. The remaining seven who purchased some of the same titles stated that they were fans and had been following the stories in *Uncanny X-Men, Wolverine* and *X-Factor* for many years. I know you're thinking that such information really doesn't prove anything. But, gentlemen, the first group of 13 ranged in ages from 11-15. The second group of seven ranged in ages from 18-26. Those of us who are in our early twenties and beyond are from the old school of actual collection and enjoyment in the simple joy of *reading comics*. Most younger people and many "investors" are simply in it for the *money*.

The companies know about the trend of collection for profit, so as in any business, they exploit the situation. We, the ones who actually bother to read what we buy, are being forced to buy books that look pretty but have little else. The companies are hiding mediocre stories behind "pretty" covers. These "pretty" books aren't cheap. As the packaging frenzy increases, so does the price of the books. Witness the glut of $1.75 and above books.

Is there any way to return to the roots of comic collecting? Yes, I believe we can. The solution is to actually buy books that we enjoy to read. We should not buy a *Punisher* book simply because it had a 3-D glow-in-the-dark bullet. Simply buy them for the stories and enjoy. I know I will.

Gabriel Garcia
244 E. 198th St., 2nd Floor
Bronx, NY 10458

...I am writing in support of Stuart Gordon's attempt to bring *Iron Man* to the silver screen (CS #28). Stuart Gordon is one of the best directors of the time and he would do justice to one of the best superheroes in comics history. I have known about the *Iron Man* movies for some time. I was overly pleased with the article in your magazine and would like to see more like it. I have one suggestion: Tom Selleck as Anthony Stark. I will support this movie all the way and I hope Stuart Gordon succeeds.

Judd Nelson
3425 Riverlane Drive
Charleston, WV 25306

"Gee, Mr. Hulk . . . that's the third time this week."

...If I may, I would like to end this dispute between Augie De Blieck, Jr. and myself. I plan on writing him, but I wanted to write to COMICS SCENE first. I withheld my address in the first letter because I wasn't sure how he would handle my response to his slamming of *TaleSpin* and *Darkwing Duck*. But since he has written a very nice response (and gave at least one of the shows a chance), I would like my address printed.

First off, I'm glad he has taken a liking to *TaleSpin*. Unfortunately, *TaleSpin* fans will have to be content with reruns. I think 65 episodes is it.

Secondly, there have been 78 *Darkwing Duck* episodes produced. I know he doesn't like the show, but I'm glad he at least gave it a chance. Maybe he'll take a liking to *Goof Troop*, *The Little Mermaid* or *Raw Toonage*. Disney's new fall shows.

I *am* glad that he stood up for *Tiny Toon Adventures*. I think it is one of the best shows on television.

I was shocked at CS writer Bob Miller's news about the Fox network's weird changes to *Taz-Mania* (CS #28). I didn't think Fox had a censor. I can't understand why a network that shows "Itchy and Scratchy" on *The Simpsons* won't allow the Tasmanian Devil to rip through the woods, or let his dad carry a smoke-less pipe. However, Disney's *Goof Troop* did do a similar thing with its classic character, Pete (Peg Leg Pete, Bad Pete). In old shorts, Pete smoked a cigar and guzzled beer. In "Goof Troop," Pete has quit smoking and taken to soft drinks and milk (well, he *is* a cat).

Dan Alexander
2925 Taralane Drive
Birmingham, AL 35216

...I don't care if it broke records and made more money, *Batman Returns* was *not* as good a film as the original *Batman*. *Batman* was a dark, violent, film *noir* drama. The perfect comic book movie. *Batman Returns* is more of a typical mindless action film like *Lethal Weapon* and *Terminator*.

Also, what's this "funny!!" and "...funnier" that the reviews are headlining? Is it a brainwashing plot to lure the boobs still loyal to Adam West to see the film? Sure, it was whimsical, but I wouldn't say "funny" like it's a *comedy*.

All I can say is *Batman* was a masterpiece. And *Batman Returns* is a mess. If they are going to make another film, I urge the powers that be, if they're reading this (and if they really care, rather than are just

out to make a fast buck, they *should* be reading), to please have Sam Hamm write it!! He knows how to write a Batman movie—and Dan Waters doesn't!

Danny Halverson
Macomb Twp., MI

...I've been waiting three years for *Batman Returns*. Now, I've seen the movie, and I want to congratulate Tim Burton for a sequel that actually did better than its original, unlike most feature films. I have seven different magazines that deal with the *Batman Returns* film, and each remarks, "Sam Hamm's script for the film was rejected after introducing the villains." It was also noted that Wesley Strick was the co-author of the script next to author Dan Waters. Eventually on the *Batman Returns* posters, and even the beginning of the film, the authors are noted to be Dan Waters and Hamm. The question is, why is Sam Hamm's name up there? Also, why is Wesley Strick *not* noted for at least co-writing? Was publicity wrong, and Hamm actually writer of the story somewhat?

Budmike Romey
P.O. Box 787
Fruitland, ID 83609

Writers' Guild arbitration determined the final credits of Batman Returns. *Dan Waters discussed his work on the film in FANGOBIA #114. Wes Strick explains his contributions next issue.*

...*Batman Returns*. A fitting sequel to *Batman*, but somehow just not as good. *Batman Returns* lacked the imagery that the first film brilliantly portrayed (i.e. the silhouettes of Batman on the roof of Axis Chemicals and Gotham streets, the Batwing against the full Moon, the comic book perfection of The Joker's origin, and the Waynes' murder.) *Batman* was a work of art. *Batman Returns* was a little more commercial. I also felt Bruce Wayne appeared more "normal" this time around. Maybe it just seemed that way because we saw much more of him in this picture. The film's pacing was slightly disjointed—rather than building to one climax (i.e. the Batwing and cathedral scenes), there were several anti-climaxes. I've read reviews that said this film is "funnier." If they did try to make it "funnier," I didn't notice. The dialogue didn't have the classic lines that the first film had, and while the first one may have been darker and film *noir*ish, this one seemed sadder—both Catwoman and the Penguin were more tragic than evil. Max Shreck (a tribute to 1922's *Nosferatu* or 1992's H. Ross Perot?) was the real villain. Also, there was too much sexual innuendo.

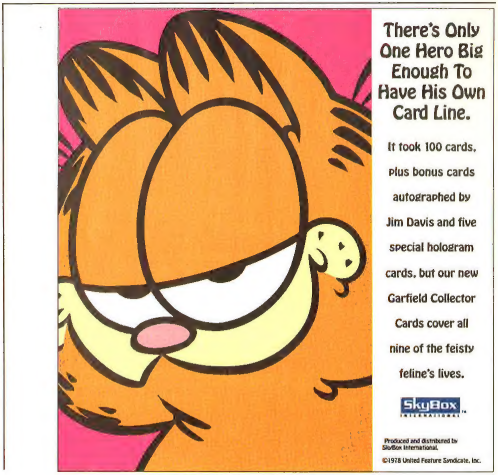
On the positive side, Danny Elfman's score was as good, if not better than in the first film. The sets and photography were brilliant, and certain scenes were simply perfection on film.

Sam Hamm *was* missed (take a hint, Warner Bros.). He had a better take on the characters. Also the fact that Tim Burton didn't have to answer to Guber-Peters may have had something to do with it. But nevertheless, the film is a million times better than the '66 TV series and far superior to the comic books DC has been cranking out for the last three years (basic, generic superhero fare. DC unquestionably has been failing in their primary responsibility—to intrigue and involve the reader).

All in all, *Batman Returns* is an excellent, though not perfect, installment of the series.

Here's hoping the third installment, *Batman and Robin*, will return to the darker, film *noir* roots, use a Sam Hamm script, bring back Harvey Dent, give Commissioner Gordon a bigger part, and have only one main villain—(Mickey Dolenz as the Riddler). And please remember, his name is not Batman—it's *The* Batman!!!

Lee Solomon
Sterling Hts., MI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BRAVE NEW WEB

By JOE NAZZARO

Looking to the World of Tomorrow, Peter David introduces a new brand of Spider-Man.

In the coming months, Marvel Comics will be looking to the future—more than 100 years into the future, to be more precise. Beginning with *Spider-Man 2099*, the company launches a new generation of their most popular creations with the Marvel World of Tomorrow, which includes new versions of Spider-Man, the Punisher and Dr. Doom, as well as Stan Lee's new character Ravage.

The task of launching this new line of comics falls to writer Peter David, whose *Spider-Man 2099* is the first of the initial four titles (it's now on sale). For David, who was already scripting *The Incredible Hulk* and *X-Factor*, the new book came as a surprise.

"Essentially, Marvel approached me," he reports. "Joey Cavalieri, who was going to be the line editor, asked me if I would be interested in developing a proposal for *Spider-Man 2099*. I guess he felt that my previous experience with the character in his 20th-century incarnation [on *Spectacular Spider-Man*] would make me a good possibility."

Marvel's original brief for *Spider-Man 2099* was a sketchy outline, which left it up to the writer to fill in details. "What I was given was a very basic, not-graven-in-stone outline of the general vision of the Marvel World of Tomorrow," recounts David, "and the character who would become Spider-Man was part of that outline. He was simply described as a guy who works for Alchemax, one of the large corporations that run things, and some sort of accident winds up giving him spider-powers. That was pretty much it. He didn't even have a name, and it was left to me to develop his powers, his character, his name and the supporting cast—all of the things that would go into the idea of producing the comic book."

David's proposal (which Marvel decided to greenlight over concepts submitted by several other writers) put forth his ideas for the series, and how it would differ from the legion of Spider-Man titles. "My very strong feeling was that wherever possible, we had to do something diametrically opposed to what Stan Lee and Steve Ditko developed 30 years ago. If there

All Spider-Man 2099 Art: Rick Leonardi & Al Williamson/Colors: Kevin Tinsley

On the run, the future web-slinger dons the persona as a means of escape

TARGET ACQUIRED! ALL UNITS, CONVERGE ON MY SIGNAL!
THERE HE GOES! ON MARK, AND--
FIRE!
THOSE WERE WARNING SHOTS! DON'T MAKE US HURT YOU!
CHOOM
CHOOM

"I had to re-invent the wheel," says writer Peter David. "The Spider-Man of 2099 climbs walls through the use of talons."

was *any* element of *Spider-Man 2099* that would make him the same as the contemporary Spider-Man, then what was the purpose?

"I had to re-invent the wheel," he continues, "taking every single thing I knew about the modern-day Spider-Man, and not only ignoring it, but trying to go in the *opposite* direction. When I had him crawling the wall, for example, it happened through a totally different process. The modern-day Spider Man climbs the wall through a process that would best be described as magic, whereas the Spider-Man of 2099 climbs by the very biological use of talons in his fingers."

The writer's other break with the current series was creating a character who had *no* personal connection with the Peter Parker Spider-Man, which should come as a surprise to many readers. "Every single person asks me the same questions, which I knew they would," he says. " 'Is he Peter Parker or a descendant? Is he a clone? Did he develop his powers through a blood sample of Peter Parker's?' In every way, they've tried to link the Spider-Man of 2099 with Peter Parker, and since I had a feeling that's what everybody was going to do, I felt it would be anathema to produce a character that did that. As soon as readers get what they expect, they become bored.

"The Spider-Man of 2099 is named Miguel O'Hara," the writer explains. "I figured just in the name alone, it already implied a greater ethnic blending. Where Peter Parker was a shy bookworm-ish type who didn't fit into society, Miguel considers himself to be a master of his own little universe. Where Peter is very bright but embarrassed about it, because it makes him an outcast, Miguel wears his intelligence like a badge. He's extremely proud, and to some degree, almost arrogant about it.

"Where for Peter Parker, the circumstances that led to his becoming Spider-Man were a liberating experience, it's humbling for Miguel, because they take his life and put it out of control. It's a very disconcerting and scary environment for him.

"His supporting cast—Miguel has a fiancée named Dana, who's very much his opposite. Where he is very smug and self-assured, all she cares about is wanting everyone to be happy. He also has a brother named Gabriel, or 'Gabe' for short. Gabriel has fallen in with a group of people who view the corporate structure of 2099 as a heinous, evil thing, which puts him in an odd situation, because his brother Miguel is part of that power structure. There's a very large amount of fairly sophisticated interpersonal dynamics that are part of the series, and are far removed from the teenage angst of Peter's world."

While David is reluctant to discuss the new web-spinner's origin in detail, he provides a few specifics to whet readers' appetites. "Miguel becomes Spider-Man out of self-defense," he begins. "He dons the Spider-Man costume because he's being pursued, and he does it to cover his identity. His origin causes a great deal of property destruction at Alchemax, which hires Venture, one of their best hunter-trackers, to track him down.

"In order to throw Venture off the track, Miguel takes on the persona of Spider-Man. The costume, which has a great deal of death's head symbolism on it, is literally lying around. What I established was that Miguel had bought it the previous year, when he went down to Mexico for the Day of the Dead Festival, a genuine festival that does occur in Mexico. He had the costume lying around, and I was very pleased about it, because it was something that grows out of the character's ethnicity, rather than, 'I'm going to do good, so I'll put on a costume.' "

Leading off Marvel's new line of future titles, *Spider-Man 2099* will change the way everyone thinks about the character.

As for the abilities of the 2099 wall-crawler, David promises a few surprises. "The accident that creates Spider-Man causes him to take on all the natural abilities of a spider," he explains. "He grows talons on his fingers, which not only are a means of climbing walls, but a fairly interesting offensive weapon as well. His eyes become extremely sensitive, and his vision becomes extraordinarily magnified. Outside of this, if he's in the dark or wearing his mask, which dampens light rays, it gives him extremely heightened vision. He has an edge in terms of dodging things, because he sees them coming before they've barely started. This is as opposed to the fairly psychic 'spider-sense,' the all-purpose ESP thing that his contemporary has, which, to the best of my knowledge, has no basis in nature whatsoever.

"Miguel also gets fangs, which are very much a part of a spider's makeup, and he develops spinnerettes, out of which he weaves his webbing. In deference to the Comics Code and good taste, I've taken the liberty of putting his spinnerettes in his lower forearm rather than his posterior —that's where nature would have put them—although I do have him saying, 'At least I'm not shooting webbing out of my butt!' "

In addition to his natural abilities, the new Spider-Man is able to glide around the buildings of 21st-century Manhattan, using the webbing built into the back of his costume. "My feeling was, if he's going to be bopping around at those incredibly high altitudes, we might as well take advantage of something that's already there, especially considering that spiders in nature do that," says David.

"There are gliding and jumping spiders that spin their webs in order to glide along, so my feeling was, why not have Spider-Man of 2099 imitate that aspect of nature? It also enabled us to put that funky webbing on the back of his costume."

Because *Spider-Man 2099* is only one of four books in the Marvel 2099 series, David has worked very closely with the other writers in creating their new universe. "What happened was that Pat [*The Punisher 2099*] Mills, John [*Doom 2099*] Moore and I all got together and hammered out the bible for the entire series. Also, the plots are always being circulated so we can see what other people are doing and play off that.

"For example, in *Spider-Man 2099* #1, I introduced the head of Alchemax, a guy named Tyler Stone. Pat Mills was intrigued by the character, and was introducing this Punk in the pages of *The Punisher 2099*, and he asked me if I would be adverse to the Punk being the son of Tyler Stone. I said no, not at all. We're trying to go for continuity, and we want the entire universe to grow together. The whole concept of 2099 and the World of Tomorrow is

All Spider-Man 2099 Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

The accident that creates David's future Spider-Man "causes him to take on all the natural abilities of a spider."

that it *should* fit together like a big jigsaw puzzle."

While many *Spider-Man 2099* readers will invariably start requesting 21st-century versions of classic Spider-Man villains like Dr. Octopus or the Green Goblin, David isn't sure that's a good idea.

"Joey and I have been discussing that," he says, "and we both agreed that having a 21st-century version of Spider-Man was pushing credibility. The concept of him facing a 21st-century equivalent of those foes would be going beyond the pale.

"Then, in the very same conversation, we both came to the realization that there is *one* villain in the current Spider-Man pantheon who we wouldn't mind doing a 21st-century re-do of the Vulture. By today's standards, you think, 'It's the Vulture! What does he do?' 'Well, he flies and he's dying.' 'Whoa, I'm scared!' The Vulture is a really dynamite name, though, so there's a chance of doing a new version, playing off all the possibilities that such a name presents. But is there going to be a 21st-century Dr. Octopus or Green Goblin? No."

David may have no desire to re-create Spider-Man's original Rogues' Gallery, but he does have several new villains in mind for the series. "There's Venture, the top hunter-tracker. It's curious: when I invented Venture, the character I described was a hi-tech, incredibly slick, implacable hunting machine, but when the pages came back, [artist] Rick Leonardi had given him a cowboy hat and trenchcoat. He looked like he had walked out of a Sergio Leone Western!

"Originally, most of Venture's dialogue was pretty straightforward: 'Stop in the name of Alchemax; resistance is useless,' but when I saw the way Rick was depicting him, I said, 'I can't let this pass!' So, instead, I have him saying things like, 'Now, son, you know you're just making this hard on yourself.' He has this fairly laconic way of talking that totally belies the fact this guy is absolutely deadly.

"The next villain we'll be going up against is the Specialist. God knows what Rick is going to draw, but my

(continued on page 50)

Amazing Issues

Meanwhile, in the present of *Amazing Spider-Man*, writer David Michelinie is attempting to maintain the tension of the supposed return of Peter Parker's assumed dead parents. "The parents storyline was going to end right after the bi-weekly issues. Now I've been told by the editor maybe we will end in a year, it's difficult figuring out how to set stuff up and how to keep the tension going issue after issue. Are these *really* his parents? How does Peter feel about it? I don't really know what we're going to do. My suggestion was to give these people a life of their own and have them just be there on occasion."

After Spider-Man faces the "invasion of the Spider-Slayers" during his bi-weekly run, there's the Venom reconciliation two-parter which leads into the villain's own series. Finally, early next year will see a huge crossover among all of the Spider-Man titles, featuring a Venom-Carnage storyline.

On the domestic side, the writer would like to cover the relationship between Peter and wife Mary Jane in more detail. "I'm generally following the storylines that [editor] Danny Fingeroth wants these days, and that hasn't included much Peter Parker-Mary Jane characterization. I try to throw in at least a scene about their relationship each issue. I would like to do more of that in the future.

"One thing we've talked about is getting them back to where they had to scrape for every penny. Danny thinks that being an actress is too glamorous and too lucrative. So, Mary Jane's soap-opera character will probably be killed off and she'll be fired. They'll move into an expensive apartment they can barely afford, and then the next week she's killed off on the soap opera. That puts them in financial straits, which is more of the classic view."

Another editorial dictate will have her worrying more about Peter when he goes out as Spider-Man and looking for ways to cope with her anxiety.

"Mary Jane will start being upset and worried about Peter getting killed," he states. "One way she's reacting to the situation is by smoking. I just wanted to do something that was believable, something that this person might do. It seems to me that when she was a teenager, she was a party girl. She probably tried smoking and gave it up when she became more 'mature.' Eventually, I want to have Peter point out the fact that she's worried about him dying when she's killing herself. At that point, she'll stop smoking."

Although Michelinie didn't think Peter and Mary Jane should have tied the knot, he's in favor of them having a happy, strong marriage and has been assured they will. "I wanted to break away from the cliches. I wanted them to have that most rare of things, a *happy* marriage. I've been told they will *not* get divorced. The editor just thinks it's more realistic to have her be worried about him going out or even for them to have an argument."

—Craig W. Chrissinger

TOPPS JOB

It was in the cards. Jim Salicrup deals out a new comics line.

By HENRY CABOT BECK

Salicrup Art: Ales Saviuk/Copyright 1991 Marvel Entertainment

Truly getting into his work, writer/editor Jim Salicrup scales comic book walls to give readers what they want.

The year 1972 brought fantastic changes to Marvel. The lunatics were handed both the keys to the asylum and the great responsibility of managing a huge title expansion. According to office boy/teen-sidekick-turned-editor Jim Salicrup, "I started at an in-between period. Roy Thomas had become editor-in-chief and Marvel had gone from around 15 titles a month to double that. Most of that was reprint."

Along with the increase in titles came a variety of new logistical problems. At the time, the books were messengered to the offices of the Comics Code Authority for approval, then shipped to the printers by regular first-class mail. However, with the increases in volume, it became less and less expedient, in terms of cost and deadlines, to hire independent messengers, and there were then no overnight delivery services. So, Marvel production guru Sol Brodsky and Thomas took a look at a letter from a rabid 15-year-old fan, living in the Bronx, and decided to give him a crack at being the office slave that he so desperately wanted to be.

"My letter happened to arrive on the day they were looking for someone," Salicrup says. "Roy had a philosophy: If you were going to hire anyone for a comic company, no matter what the position, it would be beneficial if they *knew* about comics."

Up to that time, Salicrup had been working for *Kid's Magazine*, a publication for kids, by kids (14 and under), edited by Jim Robinson and Jeanette Kahn (who would later become DC Comics' president). But his life in comics began when he entered the Marvel offices that summer of '72.

"Many people who weren't that much older than me were trying to tell me that I was making this horrible mistake by not going to college and having a back-up career. They were convinced that comics were only going to last a couple more years. Many of them were teachers and had other jobs they could fall back on. They really felt they were doing this for the same reason I wanted to do it: Because they loved comics."

His job at the time was basically an unglorified go-fer position. "I would do anything there was to be done—promo stuff, paste-ups. Eventually, I took over editing Marvel's U.K. line, which was mostly reprint material. We were repackaging, reformatting everything to run in larger-size, weekly black-and-white. Stories needed to be divided up, new splash pages and new covers created. It was a great training ground."

Soon after his apprenticeship, Salicrup struck out with a shop of his own formed with Dave Kraft, current editor and founder of *Comics Interview*. "We started a little company called Mad Genius Associates and rented an office. Steve Gerber shared the space with us around the time that Howard the Duck ran for president [1976]. We

were his campaign managers."

About then, the band Kiss approached Marvel regarding doing a comic about them. "Dave and I happened to be having dinner with Steve late one night, when Steve just casually tossed off that Stan had suggested that we do this Kiss comic book thing. If Dave and I hadn't said, 'Yes, yes, you have to do this!' probably nothing would've happened. It was Sol Brodsky who came up with the different format—I think it was the first Marvel book to be printed on Baxter paper. It was also the first Marvel title that paid royalties to the creators, because they thought it technically wasn't a comic. Marvel was going through a lot of growing pains. Many of the practices and policies had remained pretty much the same since they started in 1939, and in some cases, the rates weren't much better. So, when Jim Shooter took over, he was responsible for bringing Marvel into contemporary times."

Up until then, Salicrup had been freelance-editing the *Electric Company*'s tie-in children's comic, *Spidey Super Stories*, which was to prove a foreshadowing of his later involvement with the web-slinger. Then, Mad Genius dissolved when Kraft moved to Georgia and Gerber to the West Coast. Salicrup decided to stay in Manhattan and returned to Marvel as an editorial assistant. Among his other chores, Salicrup was required to return artwork to the freelancers, a then-new job that has since become a full-time position.

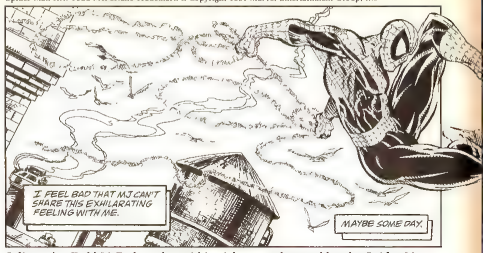
From there, Salicrup became an assistant editor at a time when there were many assistant editors, an associate or two, and an editor-in-chief who was technically the editor of the *entire* line. "This made sense when there were only 12 titles, but it became ridiculous when there were close to 50. When Jim Shooter became editor-in-chief, he created a new structure where there were four teams of editors with assistants.

"Roger Stern became my editor, I was *his* assistant, and we did all the Avengers titles, the X-Men and several more, including *Marvel Premiere*, *Marvel Spotlight*, *Tales*, *Treasury Editions*. We were the first team assigned specifically to edit *X-Men* when Chris [Claremont] and John [Byrne] were doing the book. I think *Marvel Premiere* #50 was the first Marvel comic I was full editor on. It was an anniversary issue featuring Alice Cooper."

He then went on to edit the Byrne *Fantastic Four* series, *Marvel Age* and other titles before settling into a stint as the revitalizer of Spider-Man, a job that would gain him recognition throughout the industry.

"My proudest moments at Marvel up to then included my last issue of *X-Men*, which contained the death of Jean Grey, and some of the rock-type comics I was involved with. But the difference between editing 12 titles with all different characters to editing six, all with the same characters, was that it allowed me to be more focused, which is what happened with Spider-Man."

Spider-Man Art: Todd McFarlane/Trademark & Copyright 1991 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc



Salicrup bet Todd McFarlane that within eight years they could make *Spider-Man* "a number-one title, and we did it in under four."

All Dracula Art: Mike Mignola

Centuries come and go, but *Bram Stoker's Dracula* lives forever.

Salicrup edited the entire *Spider-Man* line for more than five years, a period which saw Spidey reach a new pinnacle of fan appreciation. "What I was up against when I started editing *Spider-Man* was that throughout the '80s, *Uncanny X-Men* was the number-one title and *Spider-Man* was considered ancient history. The company wasn't putting its top talent on the book. There were many attempts to make Spider-Man more like Daredevil and Batman—you know, giving him a dark costume and changing the character's tone. My feeling was, 'Let's make Spider-Man more like Spider-Man, and if someone wants Batman or Daredevil, let them buy *Batman* or *Daredevil*.' And it worked.

"We were lucky to have Todd [McFarlane] come in at that point, but when he started, he wasn't the Todd McFarlane he is today, in terms of name recognition and respect in the industry. I remember trying to convince Todd, I said, 'Let's do *Spider-Man*. I bet that within eight years, we can make it a number-one title,' and we did it in under four. And that was not trying to make it like *X-Men*, but making it more like *Spider-Man*. You have to come up with something readers *want* to buy."

McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1, published in August 1990, sold nearly

three million copies, then a record. "I think that no matter who was editing *Spider-Man*, Todd from day one was someone who always wanted to do more and more of everything. The first two issues he did for me he only pencilled. By the third, he started inking. When we launched the new title, he started writing—at one point, I even had him color an issue. Todd's the perfect example of the kind of creator I enjoy working with the most. He's someone who passionately *cares* about his work. Sometimes I don't even care if it's the hottest or greatest artist in the business, so long as I'm working with people who'll give me 100 percent. That's more exciting than working with the latest superstar."

Despite—or perhaps because of—all the hoopla, McFarlane's writing became the target of some venomous criticism. "He wasn't upset," says Salicrup. "He knew what he was getting into when he started, and he welcomed feedback. He was looking for a new challenge, and the last thing you want is for everything to be too easy. So, after getting so much acclaim for his artwork, to be suddenly told, 'Hey, you can't write' by some of his more vocal critics just made him more determined to try harder."

However, within two years, both Salicrup and McFarlane had exited Marvel. As Salicrup explains: "Basically, there was a reshuffling going on at Marvel. Five years was a very long time to be working on just one character—I was on Todd's book longer than any of the other Spider-Man books—and it looked like many of the people I was working with were planning to move on anyway, so it was a good time for me to have a break with Spider-Man."

Salicrup speaks of this time with no hint of bitterness or regret; understandably, he has become the editor-in-chief of the new line of comics from trading-card giant Topps, Inc.

"I was happy at Marvel," he remarks. "I never imagined leaving. But when an offer comes along to head up your own line of comics and the company backing it is as substantial and impressive as Topps, well, that falls under the category of an offer I can't refuse. Even so, I already miss Marvel tremendously."

There had been other offers to leave Marvel, but Salicrup, less interested in administration, wanted the kind of editorial position Topps presented. "What I enjoy doing is working with creative people as an editor. I'm too lazy to write all the time. I like being around people, whereas writing means you have to be all by yourself. But to be able to tell a writer your idea and to get him to do all the work, that's *far* more exciting.

"Also, being a frustrated artist, I enjoy doing a scribble of a layout and watching what a real artist can turn it into. That's all fun for me, because I don't consider myself to be the greatest writer/artist in the business; I'm more respectful of the talents of the people I'm working with. Rather than telling them to do everything my way, I'm going to these people because I like their talents; I want them to do it *their* way."

...And his vengeance is swift and merciless.
ELISABETA...?
But even in the midst of triumph for a holy cause...
...There can be loss.
ELISABETA—!

Topps' *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is "a labor of love" for artist Mike Mignola.

Although Salicrup is reticent to go into too much detail about new projects at Topps, he reveals that the company will start out slowly until they've placed as many as six regular titles on the direct-sales market by 1993's end. "We just want to make sure they're all good books and try to build a solid reputation that way. Because Topps is already a very successful company, they're willing to take it slow and build a line that we hope will be part of Topps forever. There just isn't the same pressure on

WELCOME TO MY HOUSE. ENTER FREELY OF YOUR OWN WILL— AND LEAVE SOME OF THE HAPPINESS YOU BRING.
I AM DRACULA. COME IN. THE NIGHT AIR IS CHILL, AND YOU MUST NEED TO EAT AND REST.
YOU MUST TELL ME OF THE PROPERTIES YOU HAVE PROCURED FOR ME.

Combining Stoker's story and Vlad Tepes, Jim Hart's screenplay is the true basis for the comic.

Topps that there is on many of the other companies who publish only comics. With us, we almost have the luxury to pick and choose at will. The industry doesn't need another 20 schlocky comic books, so we're going to carefully consider each project we do."

Discussing whether Topps will break new ground in the difficult area of creators' rights, Salicrup is quick to give credit where credit is due. "The most progressive set-up right now is probably the Image deal, in which the artists own their own titles. It's almost like they're hiring their publisher. They have complete creative control, they get the lion's share of the royalties and the publisher gets a smaller part. Of course, there are all kinds of reasons why people go into the business; some people just want it to be a job, make sure they get a regular paycheck, medical benefits, vacation pay, whereas some of the younger guys are willing to take a risk and gamble on their own creations.

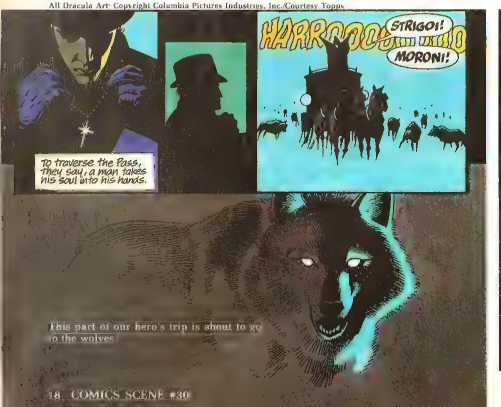
"Topps is going to be pretty much like the other companies nowadays in that we'll be willing to negotiate with everyone. Comic publishers are becoming more like movie studios or record companies. If someone is a hot property, they're obviously going to be able to demand more. At Topps, we're just starting from the ground up, but Topps, historically, is a company that has owned *everything*. They've either licensed or created and owned their own properties, so comics are a whole new ballgame for them. It's going to take some adjusting, but we're coming in with the right attitude. We want to make deals that are good for the company *and* the creator. We're not trying to trick anyone."

How closely will Salicrup be working with upper management? "Very closely, actually," he replies. "For a company as big as they are, they're very lean. Every week, for example, there's a comic book meeting which involves Arthur Shoren, the chairman of the board; Ira Friedman, the vice-president and publisher, who I work with every day [and a former associate publisher of the STARLOG GROUP]; Len Brown, the creative director; and Dwight Zimmerman, my assistant. You can't have more access than that.

"Len Brown is a longtime comic book fan who used to be Roy Thomas' roommate back in the '60s. He has been after Topps to start a line ever since he started there. He has worked with many great comic talents, from Wally Wood way back when to Art Spiegelman and Drew Friedman today. What I really think got them into doing comics is that they were one of the companies considering purchasing Marvel. It was when they were investigating Marvel that they saw the potential for what a *real* comic company can do."

The obvious question is whether or not the world really needs another comic, another comic company—or whether any company, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure in the presence of the entrenched competition from Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, Valiant, Image, Eclipse, Kitchen Sink and the rest.

"Now's a great time for new comics companies, and there are


HARROOO!
STRIGOI! MORONI!
To traverse the Pass, they say, a man takes his soul into his hands.
This part of our hero's trip is about to go to the wolves

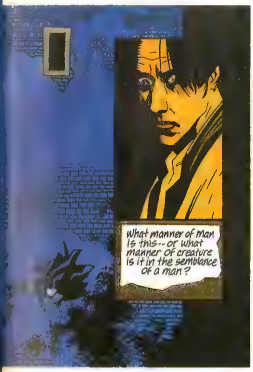
All Dracula Art: Copyright Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc./Courtesy Topps.

Seems as if Salicrup has a particular passion for wall-crawlers.

probably going to be more kids born in the next 10 years than in quite a while, and so, just as there was when I grew up, there was the perception of, well, this is the number-one company and that's how it is, and then a new generation grew up and changed the status quo. There's the *same* sort of opportunity happening again, where new readers aren't going to have a particular loyalty to any of the previous big companies. He or she is just going to be looking to find books that they enjoy, and we're going to try and make them Topps comics. But we're not entering to become the number-one company next week, we're just hoping to make comics so good, that if someone's into comics, they'll have to be curious about them. They'll be the kind that people are going to want to buy and collect and be thankful that someone is publishing. No one needs comics, it's true. People *want* comics.

"Our basic format is going to be a 32-page Baxter color comic with trading cards. The first book will be the four-part adaptation of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and it will have 28 pages of comic and four pages of the movie's making with photos and text. Roy Thomas is writing it, and Mike Mignola and John Nyberg will be doing the art. We were incredibly lucky. When we approached Mike to do the project, we had no idea that he had always wanted to do a Dracula comic. That's like a labor of love.

"Also, we were lucky that this movie has a script by Jim Hart that's a very faithful adaptation of Bram



Castle Dracula's presence bodes poorly for Harker, but well for Topps and Salicrup.

Stoker's novel, but which at the same time weaves in other elements like the Vlad Tepes character, which creates an origin for Dracula. So, our first comic book will be a #1 issue that actually has Dracula's origin in it. And since we'll be faithfully working from the screenplay, rather than the movie itself, the comic will contain scenes and material which might wind up on the cutting-room floor."

Quiet and soft-spoken, disinclined to speak ill of past slights or difficult professional relationships even when the tape recorder is turned off, Jim Salicrup is the perennial fan-turned-pro-turned-boss. Still wearing his Spider-Man ring and his satin Marvel jacket, he sums up his lifelong devotion to comics in this way: "I'm *never* going to stop getting excited about the next great writer or the next good artist or the next good character or the next breakthrough. To ask why would be like asking why the world needs another movie studio or a new record label. It's like asking why you need music or art."

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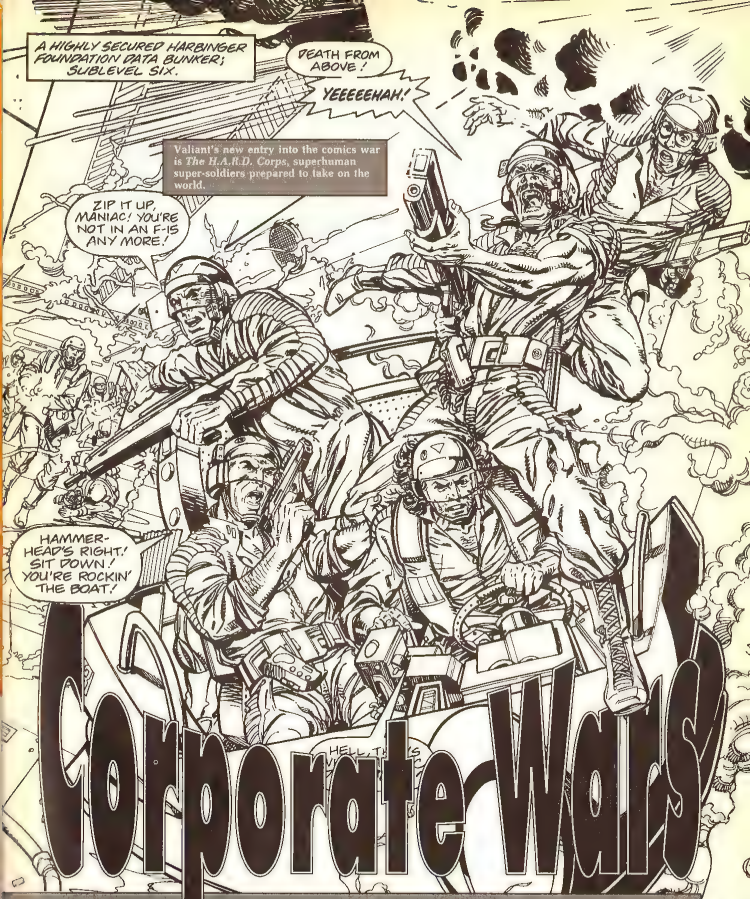
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HAMMER-HEAD'S RIGHT! SIT DOWN! YOU'RE ROCKIN' THE BOAT!
HELL

Valiant's new entry into the comics war is *The H.A.R.D. Corps*, superhuman super-soldiers prepared to take on the world.

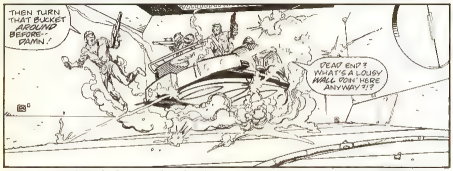
Corporate Wars

At H.A.R.D. Corps, Valiant heroism is good business.

By CRAIG W. CHRISSINGER

H.A.R.D. Corps Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1992 Voyager Communications Inc.

JUST MINE THE WHEEL, SUPERSTAR! THIS BABY'S GOTTEN HOTTER THAN BASE EXPECTED!
SHAKESPEARE! SCOUT AHEAD! WE DON'T WANT ANY SURPRISES!



"It's team-oriented; they *need* each other," notes series co-plotter David Michelinie.

In an age where ever-expanding conglomerates grow stronger and stronger, everyone has heard of hostile takeovers. They're in the business sections of newspapers almost every day. But what about a place where organizations band together to form and finance an unusual paramilitary team to oppose a mega-conglomerate? Welcome to the world of Valiant's *H.A.R.D. Corps*.

"Overall, it's about a consortium of organizations that's fearful of the growth of power of the bigger Harbinger Foundation, run by Toyo Harada," says co-plotter David Michelinie. "He's not a cackling villain, but no one wants him in control. The more powerful he becomes, the bigger a threat he is to other companies around the globe and the way of life as we know it.

"Basically, the next step in human evolution is occurring, and people are being born with powers beyond what normal humans have. Harada is trying to get hold of all the people with these particular traits and powers, to use them for his own ends. They mean power for him. Harada has great mental powers, and he really wants to find out the secrets of Power Zero, the ultimate 'Harbinger' power. So, this group of organizations is trying to keep Harada from getting the sovereign edge in power he would gain from harnessing, exploring and utilizing these extra-powered beings."

In order to oppose Harada and the Harbinger Foundation, the consortium agrees to create and fund a special unit called H.A.R.D. (which stands for Harbinger Active Resistance Division). H.A.R.D. Corps is a strike force team made up of once-comatose people with cybernetic brain implants.

"There's something about the chemical workings in a coma that serves as a catalyst with the cybernetic implants and enables people to have one of these 'Harbinger' powers at a time," explains Michelinie, the longtime writer of *Amazing Spider-Man*. "It was Bob Layton's idea originally. He came up with the idea of guys who had been in comas being given these implants. He created it, but the development of the methodology, personalities and characters has been a collaboration."

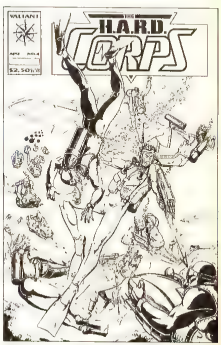
The H.A.R.D. Corps must communicate with a control group called Softcore to receive their powers. "When the team goes out to throw monkey wrenches into Harada's work, they call back to Softcore for powers. They can have any of the known Harbinger powers, but only so they have to work together as a team. One of them can have explosive power to get them through some obstacle, while another has shield power to keep them from being hit, and another has flight power to look over the object they're going through. It's very much team-oriented; they *need* each other.

"These people also carry guns—lots of guns—because when they have shield power, for example, they're invulnerable, but they can't punch through walls. If they're flying, they can't get shield power or they'll fall from the sky. With only one power at a time, they've got to have actual mechanical weapons as well."

Despite the fact that the H.A.R.D. Corps members were in comas and have cybernetic implants, they're not mindless fighting zombies. "Their personalities are completely intact and their movements are their own," he comments. "They aren't robots, just regular human beings. The implants reverse the comas and the people can do whatever they want. This consortium, however, has control over the implants. It can remove the implants and put people back into their comas if the men won't work for them."

The core group and other recruits view this resurrection in different ways. "The core group is three Vietnam POWs who were hidden for 20 years or so," Michelinie says. "They were hurt in an escape attempt. Basically, the implants allow them to see the world and what has happened to it for the first time in years. It's not just blackmail to them. They really want to make a difference now that they have this power."

Much of the H.A.R.D. Corps' character development is done as co-plotters Layton and Michelinie write the series, which is pencilled by David Lapham. "The



The corporate world in *H.A.R.D. Corps* comprises the force of evil that the team wants to shut down.

way I prefer to work with characters is to learn as I go," Michelinie remarks. "You put someone in a situation and then you figure out what this guy would do in it. As a writer, you learn about him that way."

Still, the Delaware-based writer can reveal the basics about H.A.R.D. Corps members. "The three core guys were all pilots; that's why they have these *Top Gun*-type names. The leader is Gunslinger, who was an ace in Vietnam. He's very good at what he does; he's almost a Clint Eastwood-type, very cool under pressure.

"Hammerhead *is* a character. He shaves his head to show off his battle scars. He likes putting people off and making them uncomfortable. He's also a combat vet and very good at what he does. His first name is Marion, and he *hates* it. If you call him Marion, you will die. The third guy is Shakespeare, one of the rare Jewish characters in comics. He's a New York Jewish intellectual. He'll still blow away whoever he has to blow away, but he can see their side of things. He philosophizes about it. He likes reading, poetry and, of course, Shakespeare.

"Then, you've got the recruits. Superstar was an actor killed in a motorcycle wipe-out. He's like our Elvis, because people keep seeing him in malls and stuff. He makes the cover of the *National Enquirer* on a regular basis. Flatline is the guy recruited in the second issue. He's a Korean immigrant who was a policeman in his home country. He fled Korea to get away from the oppression and set up in Los Angeles. He was shot in the head while trying to protect some of his neighbors during the LA riots. Finally, there's Maniac, who was another soldier and kind of uncontrollable. He has a stronger bloodlust than most people are comfortable with."

Though super-powered, the H.A.R.D. Corps can use only one power at a time, leaving them susceptible.

Michelinie can't say much about what the future holds for the *H.A.R.D. Corps* beyond the first three issues, since he honestly doesn't know. "Issues #1 and #2 are an action-oriented two-parter in which the ground rules are laid. Basically, Harada finds out who H.A.R.D. Corps is. He does some nasties to them, and they do some nasties to him. It's a stalemate, a battle in a long war.

"Eventually, we're planning on pulling the core group away from just the relatively-limited scope of opposing the Harbinger Foundation. Beyond that, I know almost nothing at all. I have ideas about all kinds of stuff that *I* want to do, but I *do* have a co-plotter."

The writer reveals that he would like to put the H.A.R.D. Corps up against an alien menace established in other Valiant books. "There was an invasion and it was repulsed, but there still are pockets of these spider-like aliens who happen to eat humans," he says. "I would like to do a story where these aliens have taken over a town in Oregon or someplace, and they're growing humans for food by accelerating growth rates or whatever. H.A.R.D. Corps finds out about it and wants to go save these people. They're getting ready to go when Softcore calls up about taking out a Harbinger oil refinery. The guys say sorry, but they have to do this other thing. They want to save hundreds of humans who are being slaughtered.

"In the first story, it's established that they have something called 'brain pop' in their implants. It's a self-destruct circuit that activates when brain functions cease, so Harada can't capture someone and take the implant apart. Softcore also threatens that if they go rogue, it'll have to 'pop' their brains. H.A.R.D. Corps tells them to do what they have to do and the group

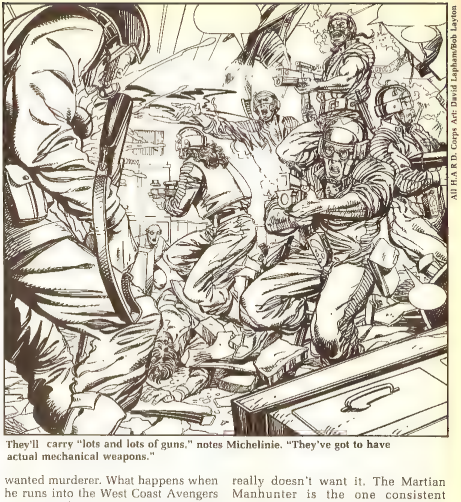
will do what it has to do. They remind Softcore that there are millions of dollars invested in them and they can save Softcore's bacon whenever they want. This time, they're going on their own mission."

Even before their series appeared in September, the H.A.R.D. Corps were introduced in *Harbinger* #10 and #11.

More will probably happen. "I would assume that eventually they'll touch base with everyone else. That's part of being in a shared universe."

Michelinie doesn't think the recent departure of Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter from Valiant will have many repercussions on the book, although he admits it will have a "hell of an effect" on the overall universe. "They were just starting to diversify and put more responsibility in other people's hands, because there was just too much for Jim to do. Bob was going to edit this book himself, and Jim was only involved in approving things or making suggestions here and there."

With Layton continuing to serve as editor on the comic as well as co-plotter and inker, the creative team seems to have plenty of control and room to experiment. "With *H.A.R.D. Corps*, we're apparently being given a great deal of freedom to come up with stuff that we think is interesting. I would assume we will continue to probably do what we want, which is great. Readers will decide whether or not we succeed, but we'll at least get to try it."



All H.A.R.D. Corps Art: David Lapham/Bob Layton

They'll carry "lots and lots of guns," notes Michelinie. "They've got to have actual mechanical weapons."

In addition to *H.A.R.D. Corps*, Michelinie is working on two other new projects and continuing as writer for *Amazing Spider-Man* (see sidebar, page 14).

The first new project is a *Venom* series for Marvel, based on an unique villain Michelinie created to face Spider-Man. "I'm doing the first story arc, which should be the first six issues," he discloses. "That will be out early next year. I wanted to do the first story to establish everything. Basically, Venom has two psychology-driven motivations: He wants to kill Spider-Man because he perceives Spider-Man destroyed his life, and he wants to protect the innocent because he used to be innocent. So, we'll have a reconciliation between them in *Amazing Spider-Man* #374-#375. We'll leave it at a point where Venom realizes Spider-Man also protects innocents, so he says, 'I won't come after you if you don't come after me.'

"He moves to San Francisco, which is where Eddie Brock, part of Venom, came from. He's still a lunatic and a murderer, but he doesn't perceive himself as such. If he kills 14 people to save one innocent, he'll consider himself having done a good deed saving that one person. He'll still be a wanted murderer. What happens when he runs into the West Coast Avengers or anyone else is going to be a problem for them. What should they do? This guy just saved their bacon, after all. It should create lots of problems and interesting conflicts. He's basically a lunatic murderer who helps people."

Michelinie really enjoys Venom, but fears he'll be overused and overexposed. "So far, everything that has come out in the main stories has been something I came up with as an extension of what has happened or thought would make an interesting, Venom story. They've all taken the character a little farther or examined something from a different angle. There's a danger now that we have to produce Venom stories because we *need* Venom stories rather than waiting until something logical pops up. After the first *Venom* story arc, I'm going to cut the umbilical cord."

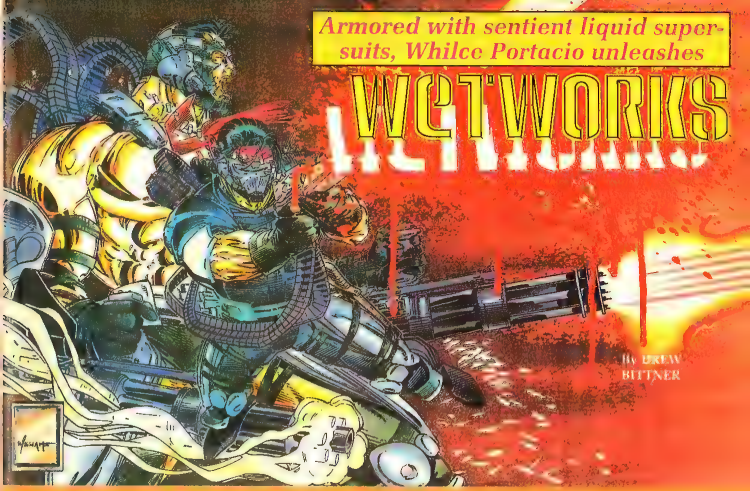
His other latest project is a new Justice League title for DC Comics, which should also be out early next year. "*Justice League Task Force* will consist of story arcs which involve special teams," he reveals. "There will be a problem or a menace that'll require a deft touch instead of the whole team. The head of this organization, Hannibal Martin, is a career politician who has been peter-principled into this position, and he really doesn't want it. The Martian Manhunter is the one consistent member and always heads the group. Martin and he pick which squad of people will go on a particular job. The squad gets together, takes care of the job in three or four issues, and the story ends. It's kind of like *Mission: Impossible*, but there will be continuing story threads."

Even after writing for almost 20 years, Michelinie still has fun writing comics and can get very enthusiastic about a project. "It can get difficult sometimes," he admits, "but if I'm given a lot of freedom and I like the characters, I'm going to have a good time. It certainly helps to have an editor or art team who bring something to the book and have good ideas. That can give me a spark I can run with or something to play with. If they're having fun, I'm having fun. It's very definitely an interdependent process."

And *H.A.R.D. Corps* certainly is a project for which David Michelinie still has enthusiasm. "It's entertainment, but we hope there will be little observations here and there about life, people and how we treat each other. Overall, we just want people to get their money's worth of entertainment, have a good time with it and want to read the next issue. Everything should fall together well, and we'll have one kick-ass comic book."

Armored with sentient liquid super-suits, Whilce Portacio unleashes

WETWORKS



I'm telling people to imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger's gang from *Predator* coated in *T2*-like living armor," says writer/artist Whilce Portacio of his new Image title, *Wetworks*.

This action/adventure series, which takes its name from a special operations term for special missions involving combat, follows a paramilitary team working for a CIA-style organization called The Company. Their superior combat abilities become superhuman when they don nearly indestructible suits of living metal armor. From there on, however, things get strange.

"The mini-series deals solely with their origins," Portacio says. "They reach what is technically superhero status—becoming powerful enough to take on super-villains and other superheroes; how they use the suits and become near-invulnerable is part of it. The suits are semi-sentient life forms. They form a symbiotic relationship with their 'hosts,' which has dramatic effects on the team members.

"As things roll on, from the glimpses in the mini-series, the Wetworks characters begin changing, inside and out. They start developing, evolving, into something other than what they were. Some of them take to it happily, some are forced to accept it and some break under the strain. By the end, we'll have a new Wetworks team that's more traditionally superheroic and less special ops [operations] than when they started."

The Wetworks team consists of four squads. There are two Strike Teams, combining one each of heavy and light infantry. Team One pairs Dozer (heavy infantry) with Grail (light infantry), while heavy infantryman Claymore works with Jester on Team Two.

"Dozer is an amiable kind of guy; competitive, but not aggressive," notes Portacio. "He's the Jesse Ventura character from *Predator*—he carries a gatling cannon in each hand and is up for just about any challenge. He likes playing and never takes anything seriously, which might cause some problems with his personal relationships.

"Claymore straps landmines to his legs before getting really up-close to his opponents. In close quarters, he'll let them go off! And his partner, Jester, is even crazier."

Reconnaissance chores fall to Pilgrim, the one-woman epitome of "seek and destroy." "Her modus operandi is to sneak in and explode out. The best way to find out where she has been is to track the explosions, and the dead bodies."

Dane, the leader, is part of the two-person Command sub-group with communications expert/cyborg Mother. "Dane is my take on John Wayne," Portacio says. "He grew up to be a soldier -he lives and breathes it. Inherent in that is the fact that Dane is very idealistic. His whole life is dedicated to serving and protecting, but he has never been invulnerable—he's only human. Until now. He's now in a situation where he may even be immortal and can become the ultimate protector, not only of his own family and friends, but of the world itself. Dane may start believing his own hype, which is usually bad for anybody."

The inclusion of Mother, however, causes more immediate problems. "Mother is a cyborg, the only person who hasn't been with the team since the beginning," he says. "In fact, she joins in the first issue, and some of the team doesn't like having a cyborg with them. There's some anti-cyborg prejudice. She handles communications, so she has to be responsible for them, even though they don't like her—it's a tough job. And Dane's challenge is to hold this team together."

Their mysterious adversaries complicate an already difficult situation. According to Portacio, a vampiric race pushes the Wetworks team to their limits, and things grow worse when a sub-race of biogenetically-enhanced vampires challenge them. The vampires are an ongoing enemy, with subtle but significant ties to the team's formation.

From the beginning, Wetworks will

be fighting this race, which has been living underground for thousands of years, led by a caste or offshoot race that's practically immortal. One of them who becomes a major nemesis for the team tries to make Dane into an ultimate fighting machine, just as a personal challenge. It's a situation that escalates into a battle of titans, of immortal enemies.

"I'm thinking of having one or two superhero teams take on Wetworks, because they'll go rogue after the mini-series," he says. "Youngblood or another group could easily get involved in trying to round them up, especially since the Company will be after them. The ideal conclusion, to me, is to have Wetworks and other groups realize that they're a match for each other, which gives Wetworks a ranking among the superhero groups around."

Crossovers are slightly problematical at this point because, as Portacio points out, *every* Image character is owned and handled by its creator. As a result, there hasn't been any definitive ranking of the heroes.

"When it comes down to who's strongest, I don't know if any of that has been talked out," Portacio admits. "We're all realistic in setting up our characters, so I think we can say, 'My character is stronger than that one,' or 'OK, maybe he's not as powerful, but he can get around that other guy by doing this.' Nobody's going to suddenly produce an A-bomb from his back pocket to 'even the odds.' So, for any crossover, the creators will have to sit down and talk things over first."

Of the armor, Portacio says it has definite limits: It's tough and durable, but can be overcome by specific tactics. "It covers the wearer with a thickness of a quarter inch," he explains. "It shifts around, thickening to a half-inch, or even a full inch to provide complete protection to the person inside—which leaves other parts of the body more thinly-protected, since it has only so much mass to distribute. If a Wetworks trooper is surrounded and hit by concentrated fire on different parts of his body, he'll start to feel pain and maybe even get broken bones from concussive force. It won't pene-

The *Wetworks* team includes (from left to right): Jester, Claymore, Grail, Dozer and Pilgrim.

trate, because the metal won't give, but imagine trying to walk with both legs broken! It's painful, to say the least.

"One of my pet peeves is internal consistency," he adds. "Many comics don't play by the rules they establish, but this book is going to keep a realistic outlook on things. The suits and their wearers have their breaking points; the trick is knowing where they are. One of my biggest criteria in this book is that nothing will just happen. If it looks like it came out of the blue, there's a good reason for it."

Having left plotting and pencilling *X-Men* for Marvel (CS #22), Portacio is excited over the prospect of doing his own work, but admits he's a newcomer to writing.

"There's a lot I have to learn," he says. "The way I do things is to jump right into the middle. Sure, you make mistakes that way, but everybody makes those, and at least you confront them straight on. I would rather try some hing new and have to struggle to get it right than do the same thing all the time."

One example of that jump-in attitude was his first professional work in comics. "I went to a convention to get into the field as a penciller," he recalls. "Carl Potts said if I needed money, I could get some work inking, so I said I would take it. The project was *Longshot*, and I had *never* done a single page of inking before that.

"As a penciller, my first job was *Punisher*, which was very high-profile," he says. "It was a real test of fire, seeing if I could do good work in the public eye. Personally, if I'm psyched about doing something, if I'm onto something good, I'll jump right in there. I've met so many artists who have creative ability, real talent, and have this yearning to be professional,

Selected Art, Colors: Joe Rosas

but are too scared to even show their work [at a convention] and keep everything to themselves. It's sad—nobody's perfect. You have to push yourself if you want to improve."

Portacio shares writing chores with Brandon Choi, an old friend with whom he developed the *Wetworks* concept. "I signed on with Image and had to do something, so

rities. Then, overnight, they become almost indestructible—will they start believing their own press? Some take full advantage of their suits, while others shrink away from the responsibility of being so much more. One Wetworks guy in particular will go into an especially harsh macho phase where he won't back down from *anything*. Another guy goes through a crisis of confidence when he learns that what makes him special *isn't* what he thought—it threatens everything he believes about himself."

Portacio is extremely enthusiastic about Image Comics. "One of the best things about working for Image is that we're responsible for our own work," he says. "If we want to do

"I can't wait to start building up these characters so that they're all separate individuals, even inside those golden suits," says Portacio.

All Wetworks Art: White Portacio/Scott Williams/Courtesy Malibu
All Wetworks Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Malibu. Portacio & Brandon Choi

Brandon and I got to talking, because we have many of the same interests. We wanted to do a pseudo-military-type group. They didn't have to be superheroes starting off. We thought it over and found we could have the best of both worlds, taking a special ops team and putting them through events that make them superheroes. Then, they could battle super-villains, monsters, even other superheroes and have a chance of surviving.

"We started with a special ops team who have a 'situation' develop, and they're encased in this top-secret weapon, liquid metal armor-proof against bullets and lasers. Combining technology with their skills and will to survive makes them able to take on super-powered enemies and win."

It is the team's essential humanity that makes them most appealing to Portacio. "Since they're starting as normal humans, unlike the Youngbloods or Spawn, I hope that as they evolve *physically*, they'll remain human *psychologically*. My favorite characters were always men who, no matter what, stayed true to their natures.

"We're going to have to have some characters who begin as very machoistic, who are trying to hide their insecurities, and then they'll grow. Ultimately, a gatefold cover for a book, we have to look at its cost. There are many things about the business we have to pay attention to now that were just production problems before. But I love that kind of creative energy."

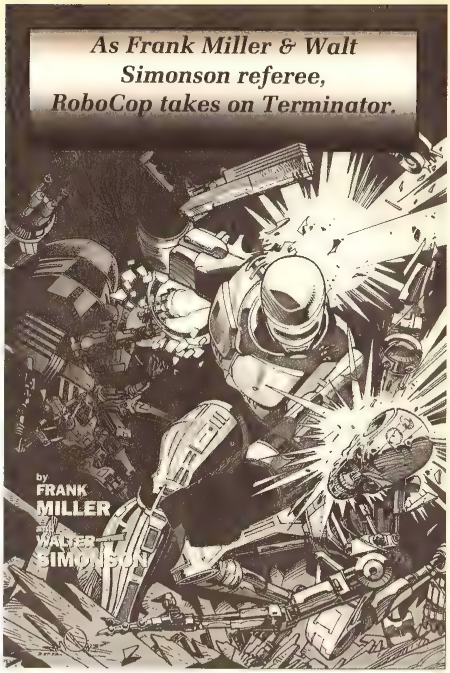
Despite the artistic freedom they offer, Image is as market-sensitive as other companies, an element Portacio regards with ambivalence.

"Not only the whole field, but a majority of it always has to be market-responsive. That's a 'Catch-22,' because as much as each artist puts into a project, we have to realize that we're

(continued on page 52)

It's electric fuzz in stainless steel in one corner. And in the other, a relentless, unstoppable killing machine. When they clash, comics fans tremble. Not only does this four-issue series, Dark Horse's RoboCop Versus Terminator, *feature two of filmdom's most popular science fiction characters duking it out, but it's the first major collaboration of comics stars Frank Miller and Walt Simonson.*

When Dark Horse agreed to set up a cross-continental conference call at New Jersey's Time Warp Comics, the winner of a RoboCop Versus Terminator *contest, COMICS SCENE had the rare opportunity to simultaneously quiz both creators about their new series and some of their future plans.*



CONVERSATIONS IN STEEL

COMICS SCENE: Frank, when you were offered a RoboCop/Terminator book, what made you decide it would be an interesting challenge to do?

FRANK MILLER: Since the source material for both sides was movies that I really loved, I thought it could be quite an exciting story. The first step for me really was coming up with a way to make the two characters cross that *wouldn't* be forced; to bring the two mythologies together without simply having a Terminator come back, chase Sarah Connor through Detroit and run into RoboCop. There had to be a connection between the two, and that connection would obviously be the premise of the two characters: artificial intelligence.

One thing I tried to put into my *RoboCop* screenplays was that he was a one-of-a-kind character who's able to have part of a brain plus an artificial mind wedded to it. Then came the idea that whatever was unique in his mind would have been the spark that made it possible for the Terminators to become self-aware.

CS: Did you have the "hook" before you decided to take on the series?

MILLER: I believe I said to [publisher] Mike Richardson that if we could get a terrific artist and I could come up with a good premise, I would do it.

CS: Did you have Walt in mind from the beginning, or had the two of you been looking to collaborate?

MILLER: Oh, I asked everyone, and they all turned me down! Walt kept hanging around my house, and he was starving...

WALT SIMONSON: I was out of work and starving when Frank called.

MILLER: No, I think it took about 10 minutes to decide, but it took another day for me to work up the nerve to call him. Walt and I have known each other for a long time, since we shared studio space in New York, and I've always admired his work. When I was in the studio with him and Howard Chaykin, the two of them were a great help to me as I was doing *Daredevil*. The idea of working with him has *always* been a real thrill; we had talked about it, and

EXCUSE ME, SIR. DEPARTMENT REGULATIONS STRICTLY PROHIBIT FIREARMS. IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY THAT I INSIST THAT YOU CHECK THAT GUN AT THE FRONT DESK. IT WILL BE RETURNED TO YOU BEFORE YOU LEAVE. THOSE ARE MY INSTRUCTIONS.
DON'T BE CONCERNED, MA'AM. I WON'T KILL ANYBODY.
HEY, LOOK! ROBO COP!
COOL.
GET A LOAD OF THAT GUN! WHAT A WHOPPER!
IT'S A BIG ONE, ALL RIGHT.
BRAKA BRAKA
RoboCop 3 Characters Trademark & Copyright 1992 Orion Pictures Corp

Miller's first choice for artist was Simonson. "It took 10 minutes to decide, but a day for me to call him."

this project seemed just right.

CS: Walt, how did you approach the book artistically, knowing that you were going to work with well-known film characters?

SIMONSON: I don't think I approached it from the point-of-view that if I was doing filmic characters, I would have to do them in a filmic manner. In my past experience, there were always bull sessions that went on. We all got together to talk about comics, and I did books as well, drawing the parallels between comics and movies. Mostly, it seemed to me that whatever similarities movies and comics shared, there were at least as many differences.

As far as the movie end went, the biggest thing it gave me was the design for the two major characters, and ED-209 as well. With those, Frank, Art Adams and John Byrne loaned me the Japanese model kits, which were of immeasurable value in drawing them. Having a real object to look at was much more useful than having however many still photographs.

What I think I've really done, from the comic's point-of-view, is get the dirty look of the *RoboCop* films and that time period. The *Terminator* time was much easier: Many skulls and fog, and you're just about covered, but I've tried to take a little of the film's look and let Frank's story dictate the way the work has gone. There are some slightly wonky layouts in the first issue, and yet there's a lot of very straight stuff. In the first issue, I didn't do many bleeds, where the drawings expand off the visible screen as it were, but the second issue has much more of that. As I got looser on the story, I was able to get pretty graphic with it, as far as the story's graphics and the layout.

CS: Being that the two of you are both writer/artists, how did you find your two styles complemented each other?

SIMONSON: I will say that working with Frank reminds me of working with Archie [Goodwin] back in the '70s, when we were doing *ALIEN* and *Manhunter*. What you get from a first-class writer is that when you do the drawings—in this case, we're working "Marvel-style," where I draw it from Frank's plot, send it off, and it comes back with a script attached—it's tremendously heartening to be able to do drawings and know they're going to come back with first-class words

"I was able to get pretty graphic with the story," notes Simonson.

All art Walt Simonson/Courtesy Dark Horse

attached. It's very energizing to know when the stuff comes back that it's really going to be done right. I can't overstress that from a creative point-of-view, and for me, it has really been the driving force in the way the stuff has looked. It has made a big difference.

MILLER: What I've been getting out of it is seeing how Walt breaks down a story, how he'll treat an idea, what sort of shots he'll pick, how he'll juxtapose images against each other. It gives me a lot of room for thought. That, no doubt, will affect how I'll approach a scene in the future. Working with somebody this good is an opportunity to expand my understanding of the craft, and also, working with a storytelling style that's so unlike my own when I'm drawing. It pulls different solutions out of me as a writer, and one of its real joys is seeing my arsenal expand.

CS: As a writer or as an artist?

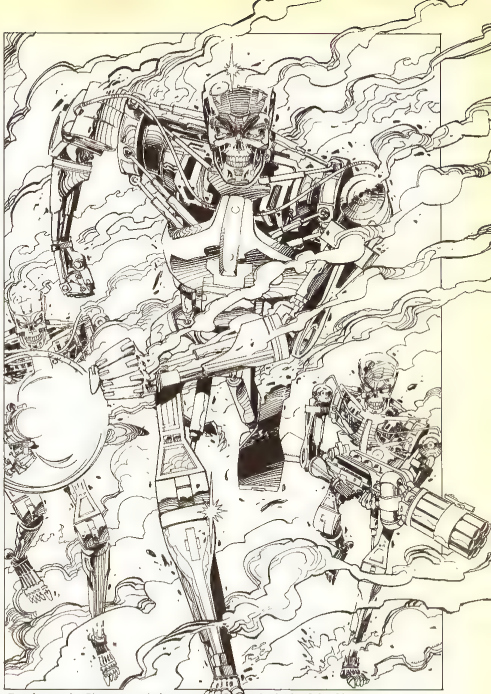
MILLER: As a writer right now.

CS: From an artistic standpoint, are you happy to sit back and see what Walt comes up with, or do you ever feel the temptation to throw in some of your own ideas?

MILLER: I wouldn't dream of an alteration. When you're dealing with somebody like Walt, you're dealing with an entire intellect that brings totality together. It wouldn't even occur to me to think, "I wouldn't have done it that way." I look at what I get, and it just works so well.

SIMONSON: If I could add one thing from my own experience, when I'm writing things for other artists, one of the joys about that is that if I plot something, I tend to see—in a limited sense—how I would lay it out. I really don't think of the layouts myself; the pencil is my eye; the thoughts really begin to flow when my pencil's on the paper. I do have some idea, though. When I was writing *Meltdown*, for example, with Jon J Muth and Kent Williams, they told stories and imagined things in a manner that was totally foreign to the way I think. We did the artwork Marvel-style, and it was a genuine pleasure when the artwork came back. It wasn't hobbling at all, it wouldn't slow you down as a writer to see stuff done in a way that as an artist I would have done differently.

MILLER: It's almost like being a batter and getting a new pitch. It's not that it throws you off; it's just something completely different to deal with. Another example of this is Dave Gibbons. Early on in *Give Me Liberty*, I would see what he was doing, and I knew I could push the story in directions I didn't know I could trust if *I* was drawing it. One thing Dave is particularly brilliant at is that he can make you believe *anything*. You can have all the space cannons you want, have 18 people doing 18 different things, and he does it so convincingly and with such a straight face that he lends it a credibility. Splashier artwork might sock you harder, but it wouldn't work that hard at telling the story.



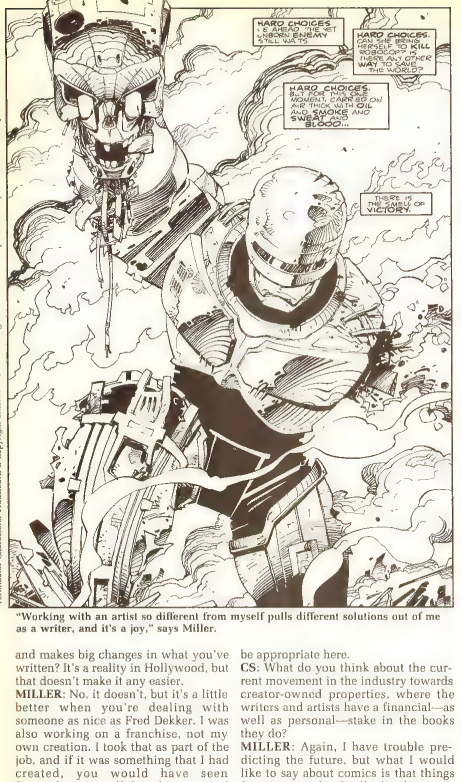
For the comic, Simonson tried to get the look of the films. "The Terminator time was easy: Many skulls and fog."

SIMONSON: The thing about Dave's artwork is that the worlds he creates and draws are extremely credible.

CS: Frank, looking at the RoboCop films for a moment, how did you feel about some of the complaints regarding the violent tone of *RoboCop 2*? Did they affect the way you wrote the script for the third movie?

MILLER: I heard many of the criticisms, but I really do my best not to react to people like Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert; they don't affect any of my opinions on how I want to do my work. Some people were most appalled by the things I thought were very funny, but mainly, the experience left me wanting to do my own vision from start to finish. With *RoboCop 3*, the studio had its reactions to the criticism that the script had to accommodate. Since I disagreed with some of the things they were doing, I felt I was the person most qualified to produce what was supposed to be much more of a family film. I basically handed that over to the director, Fred Dekker, and the final draft was his [Dekker discusses the film in STARLOG #181]. It was still largely my story and my characters, but he did a little more of the accommodating than I would.

CS: How do you feel as the screenwriter when somebody else comes in


HARD CHOICES
IS AHEAD. THE LAST HIDDEN ENEMY STILL WAITS
HARD CHOICES
CAN SHE BRING HERSELF TO KILL HER CLOSEST FRIEND? IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO SAVE THE WORLD?
HARD CHOICES
BUT FOR NOW, SEED MISSILES CARRY ON AIR THICK WITH OIL AND SMOKE AND SWEAT AND BLOOD...
THERE IS THE MENACE OF VICTORY.

Terminator Characters: Trademark & Copyright Cinema '84, a Greenberg Brothers Partnership/Licensed by Hemdale Film Corp

"Working with an artist so different from myself pulls different solutions out of me as a writer, and it's a joy," says Miller.

and makes big changes in what you've written? It's a reality in Hollywood, but that doesn't make it any easier.

MILLER: No, it doesn't, but it's a little better when you're dealing with someone as nice as Fred Dekker. I was also working on a franchise, not my own creation. I took that as part of the job, and if it was something that I had created, you would have seen fireworks going off, but this wasn't. I knew I was being hired to write a sequel to someone else's creation.

CS: How much of Frank Miller is in the final draft of *RoboCop 3*?

MILLER: I wish I could answer that, but you would have to go through one of these things to see how easy it is to forget who did what. I know many of my gags and a number of my characters are in it. Fred did do an awful lot of work on it, and while it's easy and very common in Hollywood to say, "Well, *I* did all the *good* stuff," that wouldn't be appropriate here.

CS: What do you think about the current movement in the industry towards creator-owned properties, where the writers and artists have a financial—as well as personal—stake in the books they do?

MILLER: Again, I have trouble predicting the future, but what I would like to say about comics is that things *have* improved radically. I've been one of the crabbiest about artists' rights and so on, but I've got to say that more avenues now exist for greater freedom and greater dignity. For the past couple of years, I've spent the lion's share of my time in comics working on projects that I own with my collaborators, that are exactly what *we* want them to be and are the comics that I would like to do. In many ways, not talking about the conditions under which we work for the moment, the obligation of the artist right now is to do stuff worthy of people's attention. Much of it is now up to the writers and artists to legitimately experiment with the format.

CS: It also puts the burden of success on them, rather than relying on previously-established characters.

MILLER: It's certainly one of the biggest factors. I would like to think it's the most important factor. There's still a regarding of brand names, though that seems to be changing. Certainly the Image line has done much to shatter that particular stranglehold. It's a matter of doing the best you can, and hoping people like it.

CS: What sort of projects do you two have coming up, either together or on your own?

SIMONSON: I have several ideas. I would like to go back and do more *Starslammers*, the graphic novel I did back around 1980.

MILLER: I wish you would.

SIMONSON: I would like to do something with the characters that survived, and with the context itself. That's one of the things I'm considering. I've had a couple of offers for stuff I can't talk about right now, and I'm writing a few things for other artists. I'm writing a three-part Prestige Format *World's Finest* for DC with Dan Brereton, who did *The Black Terror* and *The Psycho*. Dan's painting that, so it won't be out for a while, possibly next year.

MILLER: I've got a few things in the works right now. Geof Darrow and I are doing another series, and it's going to be much more of a kids' comic, called *The Big Guy*. That's in the very early stages, and I have no idea when it's going to surface. Dave Gibbons and I are starting on *Martha Washington's War Diary*. It's probably going to be a three-issue series.

CS: Any discussion between the two of you about working on something else together?

MILLER: Walt promised me that somewhere down the line he would write me a story.

SIMONSON: We've been so busy getting this project finished, we haven't talked about anything else!

MILLER: That's the main thing.

SIMONSON: I will say as a quick promotional plug that I've got a Superman story coming out, which is the *Superman Annual* from 1989; it's just a little bit late, but it's coming out, and in it, I managed to strong-arm some of my friends and acquaintances into doing a few pin-ups. I've strong-armed Frank and Todd McFarlane into doing pin-ups for it, and there's an absolutely amazing pin-up from Geof Darrow. Superman by Geof Darrow, I have to say, is something to behold.

CS: Frank, did you have a shameless plug you wanted to make?

MILLER: The *Sin City* collection should be out in November—buy it!

WildC.A.T.s

Jim Lee has the image of another super-team, but this one's a secret.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

What do you do after leaving the most popular superhero team in comics? You create *another* super-group. In Jim Lee's case, he departed from Marvel's *X Men* and banded together his own characters for Image Comics. This may be old news to most comics fans today, but few know how the *WildC.A.T.s* began.

"When Image was started, Rob [Liefeld] had the first team concept with *Youngblood* [CS #25]," says Lee. "They're government agents and celebrities. I tried not to duplicate his ideas, so I decided to do a secret team with a hidden agenda that *couldn't* be well-known, because it would undermine their goals."

Lee later realized that he developed many of those concepts with co-writer Brandon Choi *before* they ever broke into comics.

"We had worked on a project called *Wild Boys*—plainclothes superpowered secret agents who work for International Operations--a company that made it into *WildC.A.T.s*," he recalls. "Those samples were never published, but it got me known at Marvel. We never pursued it, but when we sat down and started thinking about what we wanted to do for Image, we came up with *WildC.A.T.s*. We came up with the whole storyline involving two rival alien settler races feuding on Earth, and how their rivalry affected human development.

"After we put most of the elements in place, we realized we were incorporating much of the stuff we had in *Wild Boys*. It was more subconscious than anything else.

"Initially, we started with the leader and his guide, and added characters based on their abilities. We gave a good male-female mix to them, and started developing villains. But," he says, "we had the premise *before* we started developing all that stuff."

Lee explains that the good aliens—called the Kherubim—essentially lost their struggle in the 1960s. In the '90s, their leader Emp is contacted by a cosmic female called Void, who

All WildC.A.T.s Art: Jim Lee/Scott Williams/Courtesy Malibu

Monique
AFTER ALL..
A CONDEMNED MAN'S ENTITLED TO HIS LAST MEAL.
UNFORTUNATELY, CASSINI'S DEATH IS OF LITTLE CONSOLATION. THE DAMAGE IS DONE.
WE MUST FIND THE THIRD GIFTED ONE OURSELVES.
PROVIDENCE, WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

The greatest threat to *WildC.A.T.s* are the Earth-stranded Daemonites, who have enlisted the U.S. Vice-President as their servant.

"It's a very exciting time to be in comics," says artist, and now writer, Jim Lee. "I'm happy just to be a part of it."

charges him with leading the fight once again.

"Emp rounds up alien descendants and aliens who have bred with humans. These half-breeds have superpowers, and when he gathers his team together, the group's activities are spotted by an international espionage agency, International Operations. They're called WildC.A.T.s, and in the espionage world, 'wild' is a synonym for rogue, or someone operating as an independent agent. C.A.T. is an acronym for Covert Action Team."

Even though the short, stocky, no-nonsense Emp is team leader, "he's not the greatest role model," Lee admits. "Void, his sidekick and conscience, can manipulate time and space.

"Spartan is the combat leader—he's a biosynthetic being who delivers bioelectric energy from his hands. Warblade can stretch his limbs and make them rigid or hard enough to cut through matter. The big guy who can manipulate his mass is Maul—the only problem is that as he grows larger, he also grows dumber. Voodoo, our New Age character, harnesses power crystals and does all sorts of holistic things. Zealot is a female warrior and Grifter is the team's mystery man."

The team's modern incarnation is considerably different from the characters Lee created for *Wild Boys*. "Some plots and premises are the same, and International Operations figured prominently," he says, but points out that the group members were developed differently.

"Everyone does it in different ways. Sometimes you start with a name, sometimes a look. Sometimes a look doesn't fit the name, so you must change the name. It's just an amorphous process, where you start at one end and stop when you get to a certain point, and maybe come in at a different angle until it meshes."

The covert nature of the WildC.A.T.s sets the group apart from other super-teams both in and out of the Image group. "They're trying to operate behind the scenes," Lee explains. "They're *not* media-savvy, and they don't want the big bucks like the Youngbloods; they don't have the toy franchise that's a part of the Youngblood universe. They're more interested in fighting for mankind's survival, and their own race as well."

A regular *WildC.A.T.s* series is planned for 1993, following the three-issue mini-series, but Lee will be keeping busy during the interim. "I'm doing an anthology series with Sam Kieth and Rob Liefeld called *Darker Image*," he says. "My contribution to that is a character called Deathblow. He's a demon-hunter with a sword left over from the Crusades. He's on a mission to destroy demons, or what he *perceives* to be demons. Tentatively, he'll be teaming up with a nun, who's the only person who can help him.

"Many of my stories deal with redemption and hope, because those are very strong themes to me, and they intrigue me a lot—stories about people who hit rock-bottom and then turn their lives around. I've never had that kind of epiphany or experience where something happens and you say, 'I've been doing it all wrong!' It's interesting how people are able to do that, and I like doing stories about that."

Although the WildC.A.T.s won't be appearing in the four-part *Deathblow* story, Lee adds that "some of the elements in the WildC.A.T.s universe, like International Operations, may play some role."

All WildC.A.T.s Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Jim Lee

The *WildC.A.T.s* mini-series will set up a great deal in preparation for next year's ongoing series. "It's actually a pretty complex book," he says. "It throws many things at the reader. Basically, it introduces the good guys, the bad guy, neutral players, and it lays the groundwork for all future adventures. Because it's the first time you see these characters, I would say that the mini-series is fairly plot-driven. When I do the regular series, I want to backtrack and explore some of these characters, see where they came from, and focus on the individual characters rather than the groups.

"*WildC.A.T.s* is about four or five different political or super groups, all vying for great power. The villains are called Daemonites. They're the evil aliens, with the ability to morph or shape-shift. They've finally gained access to power in Washington, D.C., and one of them has infected Dan Quayle. The Vice-President is ostensibly in charge of NASA, which is why they chose him to be their sleeper agent. He's setting into motion a grand plan to serve as a beacon to call in their evil brethren from the skies to come to Earth, because all of these aliens are basically stranded."

"Right now, we're a bunch of guys producing our own comic books, with Malibu's help. As we expand, I assume we'll have more company-like rules, but right now, there aren't that many," Lee explains, noting that there are plenty of guest appearances planned for the Image titles.

"Youngblood plays a prominent role in *WildC.A.T.s* #3. Dan Quayle's bodyguards in that issue are Youngblood! So, they come into contact with the WildC.A.T.s and have their obligatory fight. Basically, if you're interested in another person's character, you call him up, say, 'This is my idea, this is how I want to use them. Is it OK with you?' and it goes from there."

The Image creators certainly caused a stir in the comics community when they decided to leave their bestselling Marvel titles, but all of the discussion doesn't bother Lee.

"It definitely has made people talk," he says. "There *is* dialogue going on. Whether you hate us or believe we're doing something worthwhile or not, at least people are *thinking* about it and figuring out where they stand on these issues. Epic is beefing up their creator-owned side, and I've heard DC has plans of their own. These might have been in development before we started, but some of these companies have to provide options in order to have their freelancers remain with them but still have greater control over the things

Sidebar Art: Colors: Joe Rosas

The *WildC.A.T.s* line-up includes a bit of everything, including Grifter, the lone mystery man.

According to Lee, each of the Image creators has a rough idea of their book's direction for the next year. "We're probably the least company-like company out there. People have these preconceived notions of what we are, which are all pretty much false.

they create.

"We've just started out, and I think the changes will come about after Image has seven or eight titles out there every month with a certain market share and presence."

The artist decided to leave *X-Men*

(continued on page 52)

SATURDAY MORNING MUTANTS

The X-Men get animated again—for 13 more adventures.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

While the X-Men have saved the world countless times from such menaces as the Sentinels and Magneto, they've been ignored by a suspicious public. This ignorance has even extended to cartoons, where the top-selling, angst-filled superteam has been passed up in favor of such "stars" as Spider-Woman and Herbie the Robot.

Though they starred in one unsold pilot—and founding X-member Iceman had a thankless sidekick role on *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*—it took till now for our heroes to hit Saturday mornings.

Winston Richard—the confident, soft-spoken supervising producer/executive in charge of production of Fox Television's new 13-episode *X-Men* series—sits in his spacious office at Saban Entertainment in Burbank, California, to discuss Professor Xavier's School For Gifted Youngsters: "The interpersonal relationships make the X-Men unique. They're at odds with themselves. By nature, they're outcasts, misfits, so there's an element of discrimination. It's about trying to find a way to live peacefully when you're a minority, a freak to the general public.

"We're not afraid to confront social or personal issues," he declares. "It's not *SuperFriends*. I don't know if we're going to get into issues like 'host bodies,' but we do deal with real issues. We may get into the Brood [the *Alien*-like monster race that has appeared in the comic], but not in the first 13 shows.

"The series isn't just about superpowers. There are personal issues and relationships that make it unique. It's not *Batman* or *Superman*, where you have one hero and his buddy."

There's also one important difference from other superhero cartoons. "They're *not* superheroes," Richard

Wolverine Jubilee Cyclops

clarifies. "That's a blasphemy! It's a desire of both the network and Marvel to do something that holds true to the comic. Their perception has always been that *X-Men* is a personality-driven book more than anything else."

Richard has tried to create a series faithful to its comic-book roots: "*X-Men* creator Stan Lee has been with the project from ground level, and he continues to give creative input on a day-to-day basis. The people in Marvel Comics' New York office [have also helped], specifically Bob Harras, who's editor of the comic book. We benefit from their input. While we're creating original stories, they remain *true* to the comic."

The Beast (right) and new X-Man Morph are ready to back Wolverine.

The X-Men's cartoon cast keeps all "the hardcore characters," Richard says proudly. "We've chosen to use Jubilee, even though she's one of the newer members. Beginning with her story and introducing her into the X-Men would allow viewers, in terms of her age, to be her peers and meet the X-Men through her eyes.

"Storm, Rogue and Cyclops will be in it, with Cyclops serving as primary field leader, and obviously Wolverine,

Professor Xavier

Storm

Gambit

Rogue

the most popular X-Man. He's a unique and interesting character. Professor Xavier also has to be there, because he's the X-Men's founder/father figure and continues to be their mentor."

Jean Grey and Gambit round off the core X-Men for the series, with Bishop and the Beast on reserve status. Also playing a minor role will be X-Force leader Cable.

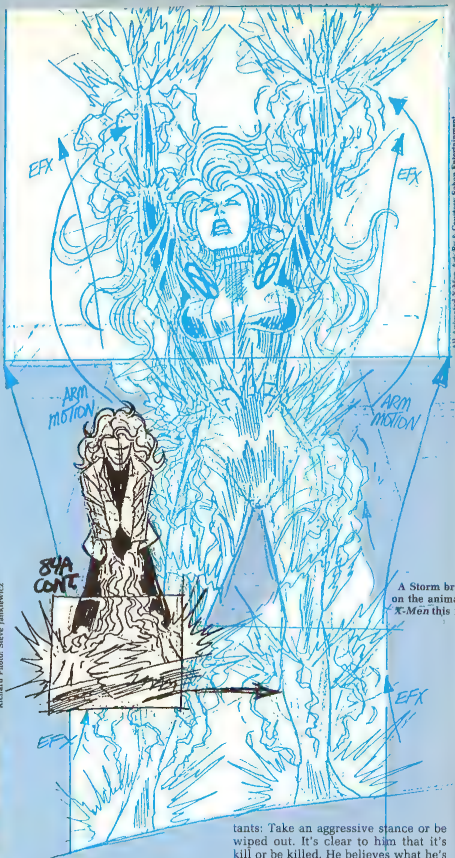
"The Beast is interesting. When people look at him, all they see is this hulking, hairy beast. But he has incredible intelligence and speaks like William F. Buckley, though he's in his early 20s. Colossus is also very much part of the series. He won't be playing as large a role as some of the others, but he'll definitely be there."

Those definitely *not* there, however, will also pique fans. "Iceman and Nightcrawler [as well as Kitty Pryde] will *not* be in the series," Richard admits. "At this time, there are no plans to do additional episodes, but we'll bring in more characters if it continues. We can't have too many X-Men," he warns. "To try to do them all would be like *Gone With the Wind*.

"We've settled on 10 core X-Men, eight of whom will appear in almost every story. Their importance will fluctuate. There will be stories that focus on Wolverine, and we'll even touch on the love triangle [that once existed] between him, Cyclops and Jean Grey. We're trying to touch as many bases as we can and still have something that's manageable and digestible to a TV audience.

Richard Photo: Steve Jankiewicz

Even as a child, supervising producer/executive Winston Richard found the X-Men "fascinating."

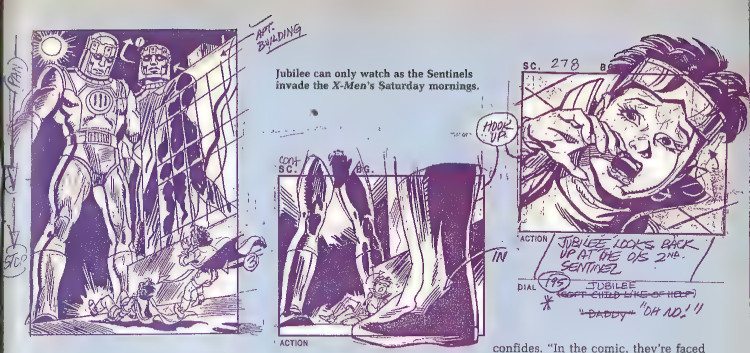


All animated X-Men Art By & Courtesy Saban Entertainment

A Storm brews on the animated *X-Men* this fall.

"We also have quite an array of bad mutants," he declares. "They're not bad in a black-and-white sense. They're motivated by things they feel are just—mutants who've gone astray. Magneto used to be a friend of Professor X's and always believed there was only one course for mutants: Take an aggressive stance or be wiped out. It's clear to him that it's kill or be killed. He believes what he's doing is best for mutants, and he's hurt that the X-Men don't share his fervor against humans."

Also scheduled to appear are Sabretooth, Juggernaut, Archangel and the X-Men's android adversaries, the Sentinels. "We also do a lot with humor, but never to the point of being



Jubilee can only watch as the Sentinels invade the *X-Men*'s Saturday mornings.

slapstick or cartoony," Richard explains. "Pyro and the Blob are funny—like a mutant Abbott & Costello. Serious issues are also dealt with. Young Jubilee is in a foster home, finds out she's a mutant and overhears her parents discussing the fact that they've decided to register her [as a mutant with the U.S. government] for her own good."

This is the second time Marvel's mutants have been given a cartoon. Why does Richard think the earlier *X-Men* pilot failed?

"In all fairness, that pilot was designed for reasons *other* than making a TV show," he reveals. "Selling toys and showing potential licensors the vast array of characters, it was trying to serve several masters. What happened was that it turned out to be neither fish nor fowl. It wasn't a vehicle created specifically for entertainment.

"It's very difficult whenever you try to do too much with too many people in the confines of a pilot episode. I think *that* is the reason it wasn't successful."

What make the X-Men so unusual are their surroundings. "We have Bishop, who has come back from the future; we'll tap into that," relates Richard. "He's a fish out of water.

"In the first arc of stories, we've decided not to have the X-Men flying around in outer space. As it evolves, we'll explore those stories. There's so much to deal with here on Earth, there's no need to go anywhere else. I feel gadgets, gizmos and extraterrestrial events take away from character development."

For similar reasons, splinter mutant groups like X-Factor, X-Force and Excalibur won't appear in the first batch of shows. "It's doubtful that they will down the line, only because I can't think of any reason why we would veer from the main X-Men."

Landmarks like the Danger Room, however, will be utilized. "That's a great, fun place," Richard enthuses. "That was discussed the most as a great locale. Everybody felt it had to be an integral part of the series. It's the core of the school, where they practice and learn, and it lends itself to incredible visuals. We won't spend a lot of time there every episode, but it'll be one of the first things Jubilee stumbles across when she goes to the school."

Many X-readers will wonder how the violent Wolverine will be altered. "He's still a slasher with adamantium claws," Richard explains, "but he doesn't use them to kill people. He keeps his violent nature, and has a lot of physicality. There's one instance where he's very upset with Cyclops, so he storms out to Cyclops' car, [pops] his claws, rips off the top like a can-opener and says to Jean Grey, 'Tell Cyclops I made him a convertible!'

"There's a lot of headbutting with his fellow X-Men, and he's a bit of a loner, but there are dimensions to him. Once he has accepted you and you've proven yourself as an X-Man, he'll protect you. Even in the first episodes, when Jubilee's taken into the group, he's in her corner."

While they try to adhere closely to the comic, Richard admits, "We can't afford the luxury of a thought balloon! In a comic's action scene, you can have someone with a 60-word thought. We have to bring that forward through dialogue and action.

"We continue to have a battle over every *X-Men* episode when it comes to the issue of life and death," Richard confides. "In the comic, they're faced with life and death all the time. We try *not* to approach it with the same kind of finality.

"There *will* be characters who will be disposed of," he admits, "but when there's a demise, it's not gonna be a full-on close-up. It'll happen off-screen. We feel a responsibility to our audience to police ourselves. You can argue that parents can turn the TV off or change the channel, and that we *shouldn't* censor ourselves, but I don't agree. As a parent myself, I think broadcasters and producers have to bring some conscience to bear. We feel that the characters remain true to their crisis. There's life and death, but it's not depicted in a grotesque manner. We keep a balance."

Action sequences will also be handled with caution. "That's one of our greatest hurdles," he asserts. "Broadcast Standards and Practices understands that the creative team will always try to push the parameters. They've responded with sensitivity to the material, particularly the violence. They have no problem with Wolverine having these weapons on his hands, because they were implanted on him; it wasn't something he asked for. We've tried to give him a conscience on how he uses them: he doesn't take casual swipes at people's faces, and he doesn't have to kill them."

The mutant's wild behavior has been reined in many other ways as well. "Everyone who reads the series knows Wolverine rides a motorcycle," Richard states, "but he rides one without a helmet! We can't show this guy running around in defiance of common sense and the law. The comic-book people take umbrage at the fact that we'll take their character, put him in a helmet and make him look different.

All X-Men Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

"We even discussed whether his mask could be a helmet. Our compromise was that we could design a pretty radical jeep for him to get around, and he'll be [seat-]belted in. He'll also not smoke cigars," the producer laughs, "not even cheroots!

"When Sabretooth shows up, Wolverine is confronted by a nemesis who used to be a friend. He had a falling out with him, and now they're enemies. We also have a conflict where Magneto returns and Professor X wants to take action against him. Wolverine wants to put an end to Sabretooth. Professor X says, 'Remember, you were like he was, but we helped you and gave you a chance.' So, Wolverine asks him, 'Then, why do you want to do away with Magneto?' "

A major part of the mutants' charm is the price each of them pay for their gifts and abilities. According to Richard, they'll still be allowed to keep their individual quirks. "There's a tremendous dilemma with Rogue, for instance, because she can't really have any physical contact. It's very evident; we establish it clearly and it becomes something she's never allowed not to forget. We have a story where Rogue, trying to help Wolverine, absorbs his power, and it becomes a real situation. All their characteristics are exploited, explored and established.

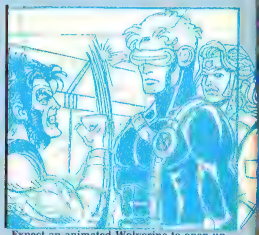
"The show's about how these people with the powers relate to society and their families. It's *not* a simple premise by any means. How to get all that backstory across in 20 minutes has been our biggest challenge, but I think we've been very successful.

"We'll refer to their pasts, like Rogue's [as a villain], Wolverine's and Gambit's. Gambit was a ne'er-do-well petty thief; a gambling, whoring kind of guy," Richard notes. "His weapons are still cards and he's still as much a ladies' man as you can be in an animated series.

"Professor X gives Magneto's backstory, and in so doing, tells us the story of what happened when these mutants came into the world. He explains how—for the first time on this planet—mutants were discovered, he being one of them."

As for a favorite mutant, Richard's choice isn't one *X-Men* fans would easily guess. "I hate to say this, because he 'gets gone'—we don't say if he's killed—but it's Morph, a character based loosely on Changeling [a character who once disguised himself as Professor Xavier and was killed in battle in *X-Men* #49], with a power to become anyone else. We bring in a female character, Mystique, who has that power as well. We [leave room for Morph to] re-appear, as in the comic, when characters who've been clearly killed off or terminated suddenly return.

"You could do a series of stories on *any* one X-Man," he says admiringly. "Wolverine's one of my favorites, the loner/tough-guy with a heart of gold, while the Beast is wry and sophisticated. We also have three strong female characters, Storm, Jubilee and Jean Grey. They're unique."

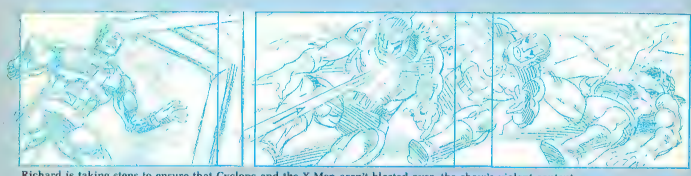


Expect an animated Wolverine to open up old wounds with Cyclops.

According to Richard, the show's plots will be offbeat. "The first episode is a two-parter, because we had a lot of information to establish. Jubilee finds out she's a mutant, there's a government program to register mutants and that [list] has been taken by a private organization led by Trask, Gyrich and Senator Kelly.

"They have their own agenda, which is to get rid of mutants. They're building the Sentinels, who are also introduced in those two episodes. We'll then go to an off-shore island

(continued on page 66)



Richard is taking steps to ensure that Cyclops and the X-Men aren't blasted over the show's violent content.

HEART SURGEON

Where the screaming stops with other comics, the Giggles begin.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

"We've never really done a book like *Dr. Giggles*," says Dark Horse Comics publisher Mike Richardson. "I can't think of *anything* similar to it. There's some pretty gruesome stuff in the comic, and it's territory where we haven't gone before—and it's tough saying that, having done *ALIENS*. But, this is a different genre. It's horror."

Dr. Giggles, a brand-new fright flick from Largo Entertainment being adapted in comics form by Dark Horse, tells the story of Evan Rendell, who as a boy wanted to be a doctor just like his father. Unfortunately, he ended up at the Tarawood Mental Institution as a patient, nicknamed "Dr. Giggles." After 30 years, he seized the opportunity to begin his own practice in his old hometown of Moorehigh, leaving a bloody trail behind him.

The character is first appearing in a three-part prequel to the film in *Dark Horse Presents* #64-66 before the special two-part movie adaptation. The *Dark Horse Presents* stories, which deal with an incident in Giggles' youth and his medical training, will also emphasize the movie's humor.

"In the comic, we'll be playing up the humor," says Richardson. "It'll be a little goofier, a little more over-the-top, whereas the movie is more straight horror with some humor."

Dr. Giggles is being written and directed by Manny (*Tales from the Crypt*) Coto, and stars Larry (*Darkman*) Drake in the title role. Coto, who co-created the character, is also writing him for the comics.

"Manny has been working with us on creating the character's backstory," Richardson says. "The backstory in *Dark Horse Presents* takes place *before* the movie, so you can get a feel of where he came from and what went on then."

If the movie is successful, Dark Horse is also hoping to make *Dr. Giggles* an ongoing comics series. "Part of our plan is to continue doing books based on the character," Richardson explains. "Traditionally, when we've taken on a movie character, we've done a lot of adding onto and fleshing out of the character, and we have most of the fun not in doing the movie adaptation, but in the story *afterwards*."

He agrees that *Dr. Giggles* has the potential to be a horror comics star. "That's a *definite* possibility," he says. "The people involved are hoping that's the case, and we're hoping the same! We like to have comics of all genres, and we haven't had a traditional horror-type character, so *Dr. Giggles* would do *very* nicely."

Because Dark Horse is working so closely with *Dr. Giggles'* director/co-creator, Richardson says a comic book

All Dr. Giggles Comics Art: Alan J. Burrows/Courtesy Dark Horse

THE OPERATION IS OVER QUICKLY, AND MANNY'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY, WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO WORK UNDER ADVERSE CONDITIONS,
DURING THE CIVIL WAR, OPERATIONS WERE PERFORMED WITH RAZOR-SHARPENED BAYONETS AND WHISKEY.
HERE, THERE AREN'T EVEN THOSE. A BLOW TO THE HEAD STOOD IN FOR THE WHISKEY, AND WHAT TOOK THE SCALPEL'S PLACE IS BETTER LEFT UNSAID.

Dr. Giggles, appearing in print and on screen, is a kind of operation never before undertaken at Dark Horse.

All Dr. Giggles Photos: Inset Rumlight copyright ©1992 Largo Entertainment

Evan Rendell (Nicholas Mastrandrea) wants to be just like Daddy, but ends up a mental patient.

continuation of the film shouldn't interfere with future flicks.

"We'll map out a direction for the character, and keep in mind what's coming up in the next movie," he says. "The trick is to try and always do interesting comics without contradicting what happens in the next movie. That's always the challenge. You don't want to just tread water; you want to take the story someplace interesting."

Richardson doubts if the *Dr. Giggles* comics will tone down the film's more violent elements. "When we do a comic, we usually tone *up!*" he laughs. "We'll be working with Manny on how he wants to approach the new series after the movie."

"With all of our projects, when creators have clear visions of what they're doing, we talk with them and get the understanding that they know what they're doing," he adds. "Obviously, Manny knows what he's doing with *Dr. Giggles*, and we stay out of his way. He writes the scripts and sends them in, and we say, 'Wow, great!' "

For Coto, a longtime comics fan, scripting the Dr. Giggles stories in *Dark Horse Presents* is "a dream come true. It was almost like, 'I'll direct the movie *if* I can write the comic.' That's a real gas. When you write a script, it has to go through all kinds of stuff before it gets on the screen. But when you write a comic, it's printed; the words are right there. What you say goes onto the page, and it's just very gratifying to be able to see the whole thing come to life on the page, instead of the movie theater a year later. I just love comics, and I think [Dark Horse] did a tremendous job putting this together. All of it has been a real trip."

Like Coto, Sam (*Darkman*) Raimi is scripting the Dark Horse adaptation of his own *Army of Darkness*. Raimi and Coto are apparently the first film directors to write the comics based on their own movies.

"I'm excited," says Coto, a comics fan with a special fondness for *Spider-Man*, *Flaming Carrot* and *Concrete*. "I hope I can do this more often. I love the act of writing and bringing something about, and comics is such a similar medium to film, so it's almost like doing another movie in less than half the time. I hope I can do that on and off, and keep going with it for *all* of my movies."

Also pleased with their union with Dark Horse is *Dr. Giggles* producer Stuart Besser. "Dark Horse was involved early on with wanting to do a comic," he says. "They have an office in LA with our production company, and this was one

of several comic books in which they were interested. Mike Richardson's an extremely smart man, and he saw an avenue where we both could go."

No matter how successful the film and comic may be, however, Besser says he doesn't foresee the doctor ever becoming a "hero," although the first film puts the character in a somewhat sympathetic light.

"A sympathetic character of this nature might not work down the line," he explains. "It works in this one, but when you get beyond that, it has to center on what horrific things he's going to do next. All I can imagine in order to make him more sympathetic is that—like *Clockwork Orange*—they make him 'better,' and then he actually goes out, gets his medical degree and goes crazy again! I don't know if he can be sympathetic *twice*."

Comic adaptations of current movies often deal with problems like script changes and deadlines, but Richardson thinks Dark Horse has a terrific track record coping with such incidents. "If there's *anybody* that's great at doing that, it's Dark Horse," he says. "We finished the *ALIEN*[3] adaptation, and that went through I don't know how many script changes. After we were done, they even went back in and filmed new stuff, including changing the Alien. You just roll with it and get the book out as fast as you can. *Dr. Giggles* will be easier."

The publisher also notes that the comic will benefit from the indelible stamp Larry Drake has placed on Dr. Giggles. "Once the movie's out, that character will be in everybody's mind," he says. "We do Ripley in the *ALIENS* comics, and everyone knows Ripley. When we didn't put her in the first series, we were *flooded* with mail. People have that connection with the character, and it'll be the same with Larry. It's *his* character."

I EXPECT EACH DISSECTION TO BE CARRIED OUT PRECISELY IN THE STEPS I WILL OUTLINE TODAY
"PATIENCE IN THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE, IS KNOWLEDGE IN ITSELF."
"THERE'S THE INNER VASCULAR, AND THE LINEA ALBA! MOVING PAST THE PREPERITONEUM"
SWIT!
SWITT!
SWIT!
WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE DOING THIS YET
ARE YOU CRAZY?
I AM CREATING
SURE. BIG OUT. SURE!

"There's some pretty guesome stuff in the comic," notes Dark Horse publisher Mike Richardson.

SPLAT!
YOU CAN CONSIDER YOUR MEDICAL CAREER AT AN END
REVERSE!
PO YOUR WORST! I'VE LEARNED WHAT I NEED TO LEARN
THAT'S ALL
THAT I DON'T NEED MEDICAL SCHOOL! I'M ALREADY A DOCTOR--
DR. GIGGLES

Richardson says that "when we do a comic, we usually tone [the more violent elements] up!"

Actually, one reason why Drake decided to accept the role is because *Dr. Giggles* was also going to be a comic. "I know comic books have changed, and they're not all sunshine and light anymore, but that kind of sets the style of it. I mean, it's *definitely* a comic-book picture," the actor says.

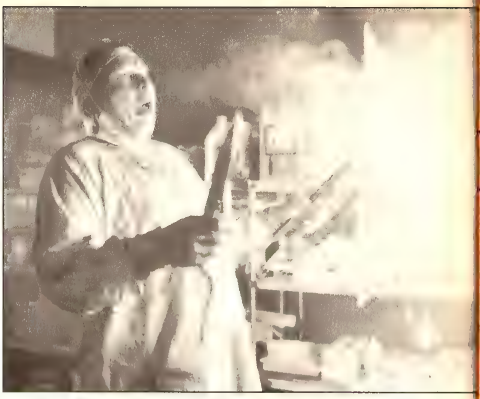
One aspect of Dr. Giggles that fascinates him is the way the film strives for both horror and humor. He hopes the movie will juxtapose those conflicting emotions successfully.

"I may be asking for an awful lot there," says Drake. "This is an entertainment, and it's interesting that there are comic books out there that are rather gruesome and grisly. HBO's *Tales from the Crypt* is such a cool thing with teenagers, as the comic book was in my day. These magazines exist

because of this audience, and that's fascinating. I don't quite understand it, but it's a phenomenon that interests me. This film will please all of those people, and others. It's not all about cool blood tricks."

Although the *L.A. Law* star is one of a few performers featured in two *Tales from the Crypt*, he admits that he isn't much of a horror fan.

"I didn't read the [*Crypt*] comics when I was growing up," he says. "I did the first one ["And All Through the House"] because Robert Zemeckis was directing it, and I thought if people saw it, it would be kind of an amusing shock, a contrast to doing Benny. But then again, this will now be the third film I've done in contrast to Benny—there was also *Darkman* [which he discussed in STARLOG #162], and now this. It's actually two different audiences; I think that those who watch *L.A. Law* aren't necessarily those who go to horror films. It's a generational thing. There's a wide variety of people of different age ranges who approach me on the street about *L.A. Law*, but it's almost specifically a teenager and 20-year-old audience that approaches me about *Darkman*."



Preparing his instruments, the adult Dr. Giggles (Larry Drake) receives a shock.

MUSIC HAD MOZART, PHYSICS HAD EINSTEIN, UNFORTUNATELY, CRIME AND MEDICINE WILL HAVE TO SHARE...
NO
LITHIUM
TABLE
TAKE TWO HUNDRED AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING!
HEAL ACHE

Should **you listen to a doctor's advice? Depends on whether the doctor is in-*sane*.**

The FX facility KNB, which has worked on movies ranging from *Dances With Wolves* and *Misery* to *The People Under the Stairs*, produced the effects for *Dr. Giggles*. Greg Nicotero and Gino Crognale explain that their work was carefully considered throughout the project's early stages.

"In this film, the FX are spaced well," Crognale says. "There was just blood drenched everywhere in the old splatter films. That's why I think this one is better—they're classy FX, not just live things. They're well thought-out, three or four gags throughout the movie to keep it moving, instead of just drenching everything in blood."

"There's a dream sequence where Jennifer [Holly Marie Combs] dreams that Dr. Giggles is cutting her open," says Nicotero. "It came from an early meeting I had with Manny. He said, 'There's a dream sequence, and then she wakes up.' I suggested, 'What if he really cuts into her, and we see the cut, and *then* she wakes up?' He thought it was a great idea."

Looking towards the future, Richardson notes that Dark Horse will offer more movie-related projects, including *Army of Darkness*, *RoboCop 3* and *RoboCop Versus Terminator* by Frank Miller and Walt Simonson (see page 29). In early 1993, the company will also do a series of adaptations of classic Universal monster movies: *Frankenstein*, *The*

(continued on page 50)

PUNCHLINES

"Excalibur" isn't just another superhero book, thanks to Alan Davis.

By JOE NAZZARO

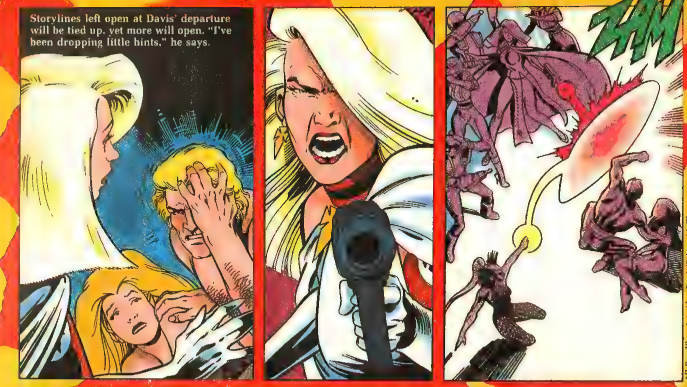
For writer/artist Alan Davis, his recent work on Marvel's *Excalibur* is not unlike the task of Sisyphus, who, toiling in the Hell of Greek legend, was condemned to roll a huge rock up a hill, only to have it roll back down. Davis has faced his own series of endless frustrations since rejoining *Excalibur*, the book he helped create back in 1987.

His attempts to take the title in a new and different direction have been stowed down by time constraints and scheduling problems, and an increasing number of fill-in issues. Small wonder that Davis—a meticulous artist who takes a full month to write and pencil each issue of *Excalibur*—sometimes feels like he's pushing a four color comic book uphill.

"I've got a lot of ideas for the direction," he confides, "most of which have already been hinted at in the stories I've been doing. I like working on *Excalibur* for all the reasons *except* the time limit. We hadn't even recovered from last year's summer schedule when we were back into it again. With issue #50, I was working nose to the grindstone seven days a week to get it finished, and we *still* weren't that far ahead. This year, there will be seven fill-ins, but that's due to the issues added by the summer schedule."

One reason Davis returned to *Excalibur* with issue #42 was the chance to continue the title that he and writer Chris Claremont established together in '87. "I liked the characters, and it was nice to be in on something since its inception. Usually, when you move on to an existing book, you're following a regime, and by starting on *Excalibur* with issue #1, I was able to put a lot of myself into it. It was very difficult to give it up the first time, and it was a big decision to go back to it, but once I had committed myself, it was easy to get involved again."

When Davis was asked to return to *Excalibur*, he made a call to his former co-creator, who was leaving the book, to make certain there would be no hard feelings. "I phoned Chris Claremont and asked him if he would have any problems with my going back to the book."


Storylines left open at Davis' departure will be tied up, yet more will open. "I've been dropping little hints," he says.
ZAM
All Excalibur Art: Alan Davis/Colors: M. Thomas

More than X-Men in Europe, Excalibur fights for right with sometimes nary a joke.

Davis recalls, "because almost immediately after he left, they offered it to me. I didn't want it to look like there was foul play. That's not what actually happened, and I didn't want it to appear that way."

Pondering what he's doing to make *Excalibur* different from the host of other mutant books on the market, Davis is hesitant. "I'm not really into doing a sales pitch for these things," he hedges. "because it's always very subjective. When we originally started, [editor] Ann Nocenti christened *Excalibur* 'a cosmic comedy.' That was something that really surprised me, because what I had originally agreed to do was basically the X-Men in Europe, and suddenly it was a cosmic comedy. I was told it was because my artwork was so comedic, and while it wasn't my decision, there was a definite intention to put more humor into *Excalibur*. There's always a punchline on the cover, or a humorous incident."

Fortunately for Davis, the prospect of doing a semi-humorous book had its appeal. "Serious titles never interested me that much," he confesses. "It doesn't matter what genre it's in or what audience it's aimed at; if it's well-produced, it's worth reading.

"Although I was given this criteria to work with, and it eventually became *Excalibur*'s stock-in-trade, I really don't follow it that slavishly. I'll do a fairly straightforward dramatic story, and then fit in the humor. if the humor isn't appropriate, there isn't any. In the past, there were other superhero books with humorous content that were written towards a punchline, or the humor would take precedence over the story. One thing I tried to change when I came back to *Excalibur* was to write it as though it was a superhero book: bizarre things just happened, with the humor coming out of that.

"Also, part of the problem with humor, as any stand-up comic knows, is that every gag doesn't get a laugh. You don't want to pace your story around the laughs in case they don't work, so there are many elements of humor that you can later stick in. If they work, that's fine. You must be very conscious of the fact that humor, unlike drama, is very hit-and-miss. The audience is usually wide and cul-

turally different, and some people might get one joke and not another. When you write a good story with lots of good dramatic tension, you can let the humor come when it comes."

Davis is quick to point out that *Excalibur's* distinctly European flavor isn't something he consciously set out to achieve. "It's just a byproduct of the culture I come from," he maintains. "I do things a little differently, but it's not something I work at. There are a few things I included, like Cringebottom, who's obviously a stereotypical bowler-hatted British businessman.

"I actually find that when I do Captain Britain, for instance, *I* see him as being more transatlantic than most writers, other than Chris, who's very good with British speech patterns. Often, I'll read the way another writer has done Captain Britain, and he comes across like Wilfrid Hyde-White. There are things that I've done, like the fact that Nightcrawler doesn't use contractions anymore, because people who speak a foreign language usually speak it more correctly."

Asked that Standard Comic Book Writer Question—Do you have a favorite character?—Davis laughs. "Is this a trick question?" he inquires, a tone of mischief in his voice. "People usually ask me to get me to say Captain Britain, but no, I've always tried to work from the philosophy that I try and do *every* character the same.

"I actually work to a scheme similar to the Chinese Monkey stories. What you have are four characters who represent different aspects of the whole. You have a monkey who represents curiosity, a priest who represents the religious aspects, a character who represents the philosophical aspects and one who represents greed, lust and so forth. What you do is have conversations between them, which are the equivalent to self-doubt and self-analysis, so when you have a group dynamic, each person in the group serves a function to the whole. If I work that way, when a certain situation crops up, I say this is the character who would react in this way."

As a writer/artist, Davis has doubts about artists who splash certain popular characters across their pages under the guise of having a favorite. "Or maybe it's easier to sell the original pages of artwork," he comments. "If you look at many of the comics coming out, when you see a dynamic group shot that takes up half or three quarters of a page, you see that the story is a very small consideration to some artists."

Once Davis gets *Excalibur* back on schedule, his primary priorities are to concentrate on character development and to start picking up some plot threads that have been dangling for well over a year; in the case of one storyline, much longer. "After the Crazy Gang, the next story will be a two-parter which concludes the Saturnyne/Jamie Braddock/Nigel Frobisher/Vixen plotline we started way back in *Excalibur* #5. There's a wide number of stories I've already figured out; I've been dropping little hints about some of them since #42.

"I suppose there will be more of Phoenix, who has been a bit vague in the past. I have a few ideas for when she returns to Earth, and there will be a story where the entire group travels with her to the Days of Future Past [first seen in *X-Men* #141-142].

"Rachel's relationship with the Phoenix will be vastly different from what it has been before, and the Phoenix power will now have a definite limit," he promises. "She won't be so infinitely powerful that you have to keep knocking her out to prevent her from saving the day in two minutes. That was the big problem we always had with the Phoenix. Why do you need a group when you have a person who can gobble up a whole planet on her own? We'll knock her out so we can continue the story.

"...erything was going wrong" for Captain Britain, says Davis. "...s a matter of losing the whole idea of his being clumsy."

All Excalibur characters & art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

"Most of the development with Captain Britain is over. It'll be finished with the Crazy Gang story, basically, which was to get rid of this whole idea of his being clumsy. Everything was going wrong for him all the time, and it was just to get an easy laugh.

"Meggan has far more to be explained about herself, most importantly that she's *not* a bimbo, which is what she has been saddled with. Really, it's just that her perceptions are vastly different from those of a normal person. Because she hasn't learned how to read, she's not confined to thinking in language as we do because of the way we're educated. It's not that she's stupid; she's simply different."

One of Davis' subtler bits of characterization involves Nightcrawler, who has already been experiencing a gradual change of persona. "What I have started doing," explains the writer, "is to evolve Nightcrawler into a slightly different character, to actually have him question his position in the group, and to also become more serious. Because of his Catholicism, taking responsibility for the group is a far bigger burden, and he can't be cavalier about it. He can be cavalier about his own mortality, but not when he's responsible for others.

"There are already story threads going out of how Nightcrawler feels responsible for the end of Rachel's life as she knew it. Things will continue in that way, and he'll actually become darker in his own mind."

Another "character" undergoing changes of a more physical nature is Widget, the group's resident robot. While Davis promises some major future developments, he cautions readers not to take everything they've seen in recent issues at face value.

"Widget has quite a bit going on at the moment," he chuckles, "but some of it was really to confuse the issue. The problem with most stories is they've been told so many times before that *any* experienced comic reader will pick up a book, and within the first two pages, he knows the butler did it, what weapon he used and in which room he did it. The only way to add an element of the unexpected is to throw in a few red herrings."

While Davis plans to continue exploring the nature of *Excalibur*'s core characters, some of the book's late arrivals will also receive more attention. "The new characters—Cerise, Kylun

(continued on page 50)

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Davis

(continued from page 48)

and Micromax—will all bring their own storylines into the group," he promises. "Part of the reason to bring them in was to try and generate more potential. When you have characters like Nightcrawler and Shadowcat who have been around a long time, you really *can't* change them too radically, and since they've all been fully explored, there isn't much left to do. Each of the new characters has a past that they can bring to the group."

Davis confirms that Excalibur *will* meet their parent group, the X-Men, though it's an encounter he hasn't been rushing to do.

"It's long overdue," he agrees, "and there has been a lot of fan reaction like, 'When is this going to happen?' Terry [Kavanagh, *Excalibur* editor] actually wanted me to do it much sooner, but I thought it would make Excalibur look bad if we did it *too* early. They had lost so much credibility because the characters had been subordinated for quick laughs. What I wanted to do was try and get the group on an even footing, instead of this being a joke book where Captain Britain was an idiot, Meggan was a moron and it went on from there."

As for future plans, Davis insists that all his efforts, for the foreseeable future, are being devoted exclusively to *Excalibur*. "I've always got ideas for other things," he admits, "but if you're working on a project you enjoy, you dilute your energies when you start working on other things. If you really want to do other projects, you can't be enjoying what you're doing.

"Writing and drawing a book is a month's work for me, and I can't ever see myself catching up. When you're doing 22 pages and a cover each month, it's a lot of work. The problem is I work to a standard where I *could* hack the book out faster, but I wouldn't enjoy it. Enjoying my work is more important than the amount I could earn by doing it faster."

How long does Alan Davis hope to stay with Britain's most offbeat supergroup? "There's a big question mark over that, but I would like to stay with *Excalibur*, because Terry is great to work with. He encourages me to do whatever I want, to be different in the ideas I throw out. He never says, 'Let's not try that, it sounds too off the wall.' He'll always say go with it.

"When I came onto *Excalibur*, I was really bringing it back from the dead. Because the book's sales weren't very high, it's not like anyone wants to interfere with us at the moment. The real joy of *Excalibur* is being allowed to develop it in the way I would like to see it." CS

Spidey 2099

(continued from page 14)

take is that he's a 21st-century samurai. After that, we bring in Caligula, who's just nuts. He's going to be the *Spider-Man 2099* equivalent of the Green Goblin. This guy is *not* dealing with a full deck."

Whether one of these characters will become *the* villain for the new series, David feels it's too early to tell. "My favorite *Spider-Man* line that never got through was where the contemporary Spider-Man finds a baby in an alley, and he brings the baby to a hospital. The nurse says to him, 'Are you the father?' and I had Spider-Man say, 'Gee, I don't know; let's throw him against the wall and see if he sticks! That was cut by the editor, who thought it was *too* flip, but I have the same feeling here about the villains: Let's throw them against the wall and see who sticks."

Regarding the work of *Spider-Man 2099* artist Rick Leonardi, David is very happy with what he has seen so far. "Basically, my plots tend to be fairly detailed, going into depth as to what I want to see," he says. "If Rick is interested in doing a different take, he's always welcome to call me up and ask, 'What if we do this?' That's something he did when questioning Spider-Man's escape from Venture, and I built much of the strategy that Spider-Man uses at the beginning of issue #2 around Rick's suggestions.

"On the other hand, when Rick visualized Venture with the cowboy hat, it was a total surprise to me. I pretty much reacted the same way Stan Lee did when he got back the pages with Galactus [from artist Jack Kirby], looked at the little guy on the surfboard and said, 'Who the hell is this?' As the writer, you try and be flexible, although you hope the artist will occasionally give you a buzz."

Despite the raft of Spider-Man books already on the stands, Peter David feels *Spider-Man 2099* will offer its readers something different. "Hopefully, it's going to be the same thing that has made people interested in the Hulk," he comments. "Sales have gone up something like 50 to 75 percent since I've been writing the book, and that's because people buying *The Incredible Hulk* are getting this sense that, 'Gee, I thought I knew everything that could possibly be done with the Hulk, but I'm wrong.'

"What I'm hoping is that people will have the same sense on *Spider-Man 2099*, where they say, 'Look at this, it's a totally new take on a very old character.' It's a very different style of storytelling from the original Spider-Man. Hopefully, people will find it to their liking." CS

Giggles

(continued from page 44)

Wolf Man, Dracula, The Invisible Man, The Creature from the Black Lagoon and *The Mummy*.

"We're doing the *original* movie stories, spreading them around," Richardson reveals. "We'll also be inserting movies you've never seen, movies that were never made, like *Return of the Wolf Man*—all-new movies starring those characters.

"For example, one of these projects will see Dr. Frankenstein, in his search for the secret of life, go to Egypt, because he has heard of the abilities of ancient Egyptians. You can imagine who the Frankenstein Monster will run into. I even want to do *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*—it was one of the best! It was originally titled *The Brain of Frankenstein*, and Abbott and Costello weren't even in it, until it was rewritten."

Richardson also notes that several Dark Horse properties are in screen development.

"We take in properties that Dark Horse Entertainment feels are good movie projects," he explains. "We bring them in to Largo, and they decide whether they want to pass or go with them. So far, we're doing *Concrete*, written by Larry Wilson and Caroline Thompson (see CS #24) with Paul Chadwick. Over the last three or four years, *Concrete* has won more awards than any other comics series. It's a huge critical success, and we think it will translate into a really nice movie. It's a story that appears to be very strange, but it's basically about a man who finds himself in a one-ton concrete body and tries to deal with everyday things, like his mother dying and helping a farm survive.

"We've also set up a new creation of mine and Mark Verheiden called *Time Cop*; we're doing that with Sam Raimi through Largo, and have a number of others. We've been lucky—they've been excited about all of the projects we've brought them."

Dark Horse is proud of their adaptations and follow-ups, but Richardson points out that their philosophy is responsible for the company's great popularity.

"We've always been successful in our movie adaptations. Rather than just put something out to tie into a property that has been a motion picture and may have an audience, we've always tried to pick properties that would work in comics best, and we've always tried to be very faithful with the most appropriate artists and writers," Mike Richardson says. "When we expand upon them, we don't do more of the same. We really try to do the *next* movie in the series." CS

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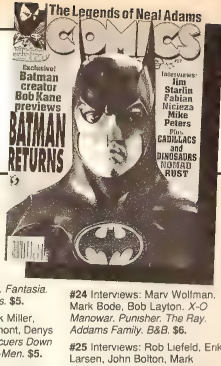
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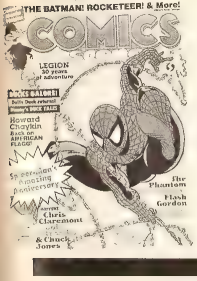

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Lee

(continued from page 35)

(which he discussed in CS #21) and Marvel and join Image to control and own the characters he creates. "When I start plotting and writing a title, I find that in order to give it any sort of movement, I have to come up with new ideas and protagonists and villains," he says. "That's part of the job. I did it so I could have stories to tell, but I was giving away all of these things I created to a company for them to own and exploit *forever*.

"After a while, I decided that I wanted to have something of my own, something I can say I created, something that I own and can determine what to do with after creating it. That was first and foremost in my mind. Ultimately, when you think about the Sunday funnies, Hank Ketcham created *Dennis the Menace*, and he *owns Dennis the Menace*. Who owns Spider-Man? Not Stan Lee or Steve Ditko or Jack Kirby—it's Marvel Comics. At some point in a freelancer's life, they may go, 'I would like to have something of my own, to pass on to my heirs or whatever, just so I can say I created this character.' It may be an awful character, but at least I've tried to make my mark."

Regardless, Lee insists that it was never a question of being unhappy with Marvel or being tired of *X-Men*.

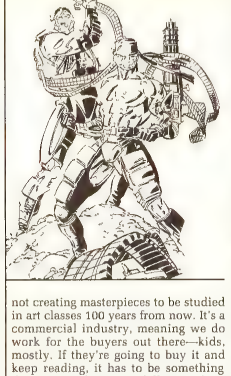
"I've always enjoyed the X-Men," he comments. "They were my favorite characters when I was collecting comics. There are certain business practices at Marvel that I wasn't crazy about, but nothing I want to bring up.

"Out of this relationship where everything we create is owned by a company, it sets the tone for the relationship between creator and company. I'm not going to go into every gripe I have with Marvel, but every problem I've had with them probably stems from that relationship as it's set up today, and the fact that we're powerless in that kind of relationship. I can create something for them today, and tomorrow they can fire me off that book and completely change the character. That's the kind of power they have over things you've just created for them."

With *WildC.A.T.s* and *Deathblow*, Jim Lee and Image are doing their best to keep comics interesting. "It's a very exciting time to be in comics," he says. "The industry is changing at a very rapid pace, and I think it's exciting to see what's coming out of all this change. Next year is going to be even crazier. Image is probably the best career decision I've ever made and I'm just very happy to be part of it, and doing whatever I want. It's a liberating experience." CS

Networks

(continued from page 28)



not creating masterpieces to be studied in art classes 100 years from now. It's a commercial industry, meaning we do work for the buyers out there—kids, mostly. If they're going to buy it and keep reading, it has to be something they want. The major difference here is, no one's sending down word from on-high about how to do things."

What's also great is that Image employs his friend and studio-mate Jim Lee (see page 33) among its legion of fan-favorite comics creators. Sharing a studio with other top-notch artists is a huge benefit in Portacio's eyes.

"We challenge each other," he says. "Everything we can do, we believe in doing well, given the kind of tight deadlines we have. When Homage [Studios, his company] started out, we found out a book we were doing was already behind schedule; we ended up doing the whole thing, from pencils through colors, in nine days. Collaboration-wise, things like that bring out our best—we don't sit around thinking; we just plowed through it and bang!"

When Portacio first entered the comics industry, he thought it was very centralized. He says that the reality of comics creation is one of the worst aspects of the business.

"Everyone is a freelancer," he says. "Everyone lives everywhere. On one book, we had a writer in Illinois, a letterer in New Jersey, a colorist I don't know where and an inker in San Diego. You can work with someone six months or a year and he's only a voice on the phone, nothing more. I've gone up to Los Angeles once or twice, met Steve Gerber and Frank Miller. It's fantastic meeting those guys, but I can't see them just to shoot the breeze about the work. It almost has to be on the phone or not at all.

"The problem with working that way is that I have very little access to other writers. Even when you get to meet someone, you both have your own schedules to maintain. The only people I can really bounce ideas off of and get a reaction from are the guys in the studio. We're willing to ask each other, 'Does this work?' and say if it doesn't, and give reasons why. It has helped all of us grow, and I hope more studios form in the future, because I know firsthand how helpful they are."

Homage Studios has more projects in mind for the near future than comics alone. According to Portacio, the artists are planning to shoot videos on how they create their comics, taking advantage of increased awareness of comics creators.

"There's a lot that goes on behind the page," he says, "and we know the process better than a video crew would. We think this could lead into a series of insiders' looks at the world of comics. Fans might enjoy seeing it from the other side.

"We want to do things in a logical, realistic way, and do it the best way we can. I truly believe that if an artist follows his instincts, he'll do his best work; any artist, be he a writer, penciller, singer, actor. It's a piece of yourself, and it comes from the heart. That's the idea: To touch somebody."

Portacio consciously tries to avoid drawing like other artists. "There are artists of all types who come into the field trying to be somebody else," he says. "If you try to copy a successful artist, you end up exaggerating their mistakes. I've got mistakes, bunches of them, but I try not to pick up somebody else's on top of them. It's a hard dilemma to do what you feel is right, and then remember what you did to make that happen in the first place.

"It's like being a film director. His job is making an audience react the right way at the right time; to cry, to laugh, to feel. You make them respond, but you don't always know why they did, and you have to keep trying to recapture that success. So, you put in your own personal things and hope they work."

Describing his work as akin to film direction is a natural metaphor for Whilce Portacio: He hopes to eventually become a film director. To that end, he cherishes the notion that *Wetworks* could move to the screen.

"We're very consciously keeping the art within the technical limits of what can be done in film today," he says. "I'm treating everything as though it were a high-budget science-fiction movie, because I would like to make it someday. I like to think this series could go to the big screen. It has more than enough action and adventure!" CS

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Keeper of the Genie

By KYLE COUNTS

Eric Goldberg animates the only friend Aladdin may ever need.

Eric Goldberg has been working on Walt Disney Pictures' new animated feature, *Aladdin*, for nearly two years, but you would never know it by his cheerful disposition. Now, at the tail end of his stint as supervising animator—he's already at work on his next project, *Pocahontas*, which he'll helm with *Rescuers Down Under* co-director Mike Gabriel—Goldberg appears delighted to again be answering questions about his first Disney project, the studio's 31st animated feature.

Certainly, this is a man who loves his work—what animator wouldn't be thrilled to bring to life the film's most audacious character, the Genie, voiced by Robin Williams? But while Goldberg may be a comparatively new member of the Disney animation family, he's no stranger to the art form, having worked for Richard Williams in the early '70s and '80s and operated his own animation company, Pizazz Pictures, for six years with partners Pam Dennis and Mario Cavelli.

After being courted by Disney for two years—principally by Charles Fink, the development exec who gave *Beauty & the Beast* screenwriter Linda Woolverton her first job in feature animation—Goldberg decided to leave behind the world of commercials and TV specials (like his *Ziggy's Gift*). "Disney had been approaching me for various projects, and the commercial grind was really taking its toll on my health," he says, seated in one of his two offices at the Glendale animation facility. "I was also noticing many good things happening in American animation. So, I really wanted to come back [to the States] and work for Disney. I knew it would happen when the time—and the project—was right."

Goldberg was invited to participate in *Beauty & the Beast*, but he declined. "I didn't feel I could bring anything to it that was really my forté, but the idea of *Aladdin* really intrigued me, and I liked what directors John [Musker] and Ron [Clements] had produced up to [that point]. I liked *The Great Mouse*

Photo: Robert Isenberg

As an *Aladdin* supervising animator, Eric Goldberg is the keeper of the Genie.

Detective and *The Little Mermaid*, both Musker-Clements works, very much. I was very impressed with the direction they were taking."

The animator joined the *Aladdin* crew in September 1991, even though he didn't yet knew exactly what his job would be or which character he would animate. "I read the script and the Genie just leapt off the page," he recalls. "John and Ron [without any prompting from me] said, 'We would like you to do the Genie.' And I said, 'Great!'"

For Goldberg, the assignment was a twin blessing: the opportunity to animate a character he loved to be involved with a widescreen animated film the likes of which hasn't been seen for quite a long time.

"It's something I've never experienced. Having my name attached to a Disney film *and* knowing that it's a film that will live on for generations to come, for generations," he enthuses. "That's why I do denigrate the TV commercial work I did for 13 years—there were a couple of commercials I worked on that won Clio Awards. But the fact is, the most kudos I got from my peers [in animation] was when they would say, 'Gee, that looked really nice on the air [on TV].' At the end of the day, you have had 30 seconds of film you had put your heart and soul into that you didn't really invest many emotions in, though you could make it energetic, jazzy, well-drawn and well-animated. It's not the same thing as going into a theater [where your picture is playing] and hearing the audience rock with laughter.

"There's such a character animator in my blood. I still get the biggest buzz out of making a character come alive. It's a force not to be denied."

In working on the Genie of *Aladdin*, who's on screen for 1,500 feet of film, Goldberg would be able to solidly flex his character animator muscles, imbuing the Genie with a "wacky energy" inspired, in no small part, by Robin Williams' brilliant improvisational vocal sessions. As Williams had not yet signed, Goldberg did a couple of experimental pieces of Genie animation using bits from Williams' comedy albums.

"It was a lot of fun," Goldberg smiles. "It sold Jeffrey [Katzenberg] on the concept, and ultimately, I think it had a large hand in selling Robin on the concept. When he actually saw the stuff moving to his voice, I think he got off on it. Eventually, he was very, very pleased—even with those early tests."

The character went through a number of designs before Musker-Clements and Goldberg decided on the "simplified and curvy" look audiences will see in the finished film. Says Goldberg, "We tried different types of designs. We tried a part-animal, part-spirit Genie; we tried fat Genies, slightly 'bluesier' Genies. The first thing we settled on was the eyes—the mouth area, which came originally from a caricature of Robin and then branched into different areas.

"John and Ron wanted the Genie's physique to look like a beast of burden, like a guy with a big, barrel chest with wrist cuffs and a too-small wisp of hair!—more like the classical strongman Genie. They were looking for much more anatomically definable pectorals, define the biceps—you know, your typical large-muscled Disney character."

But the animator wanted to go in a different direction. "I wanted to make him much more graphic, to give the character a sense of freedom, spirit and movement—you get more simplified, elegant curves, which you can't get if you're drawing all that anatomy. So, they let me run with it in those experimental tests, and we started nailing down the design more and more."

As the Genie's form and structure came more sharply into focus, certain early design elements, according to Goldberg, were "pared off the Genie. Clothing, vests, turbans, whatever. The more streamlined he got, the more everybody seemed to like it. Ultimately, he looked like a curvy wisp of smoke. So, we did some tests, which proved to him and John that you wouldn't believe him as a three-dimensional character, even though he was drawn in a very two-dimensional, graphic way.

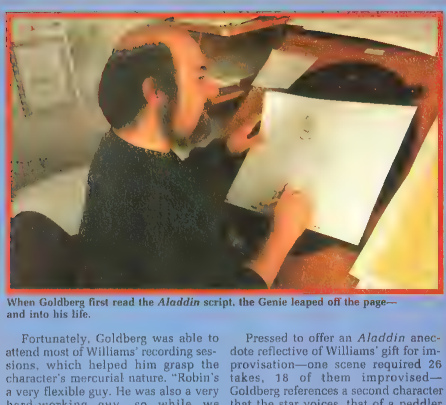

Photo Robert Tinney.

When Goldberg first read the *Aladdin* script, the Genie leaped off the page—and into his life.

Fortunately, Goldberg was able to attend most of Williams' recording sessions, which helped him grasp the character's mercurial nature. "Robin's a very flexible guy. He was also a very hard-working guy, so while we wouldn't have him for very long—maybe we would get him for a four-hour stint or something—we would get four hours of material when we walked out of the studio. It was an absolutely concentrated, sheer bravura performance. It had an effect on us, because we felt we didn't have to pull any punches [in our animation]."

"We had a script written, and John and Ron and Ted [Elliot] and Terry [Rossio], the other two writers, did a great job of capturing a Robinesque feel on the page; but Robin, of course, took lots of detours, which we encouraged. He turned the script as first written into many character types: A game show host, an evangelist, a huge balloon...When Robin recorded, he gave us his entire catalog of celebrity impressions as well, so we got Walter Cronkite, Peter Lorre, Groucho Marx, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jack Nicholson and on and on. Because we knew he could do Groucho, for instance, at a recording session we would say, 'Try this a number of different ways.' Then, we would take his best line reading as Groucho and put that into the film."

The Genie was, Goldberg concedes, a total collaboration between himself, the writers and Williams. "And the storyboard artists, too, made no small contribution as far as the character was concerned, as well as all the other Genie animators on the unit. We had eight total, including Tom Sito and myself. They did absolutely terrific work. Most people look at it and think it looks like the work of one hand, which is pretty amazing."

Pressed to offer an *Aladdin* anecdote reflective of Williams' gift for improvisation—one scene required 26 takes, 18 of them improvised—Goldberg references a second character that the star voices, that of a peddler who functions as narrator for the film's opening and closing.

"He's an on-camera narrator," explains Goldberg, obviously relishing his memory of the experience. "He's selling his wares to the audience. But on that day, it *wasn't* playing funny, and Robin was trying to come up with stuff to make it funny. The grand experiment was to put lots of stuff in a box, cover the box, get him into the recording studio, uncover the box and let him go, picking up props and extemporizing.

"We got some great stuff, more than we could ever use, like [adopting a Middle Eastern accent], 'Oh, this is very rare...I have never seen one of these intact before...it's the famous Dead Sea Tupperware!' [pretending to pop open the lid] 'Ah! Still good!' "

Goldberg then simulates Williams taking out another item from the box, the Middle Eastern accent intact: " 'It's a combination hookah [an Eastern smoking pipe] and coffeemaker...also makes Julienne fries.' There were many things we couldn't use, like a bit he did with a bra," he laughs.

The artist is the first to admit that as he delved into his work, he worried that he might not be able to do justice to Williams' multi-leveled personality. Goldberg's fears were countered by his realization that "I felt we had a major responsibility in bringing this film to the screen, because if people knew it was Robin's voice, their expectations were going to be high. Also, with animation, people expect the animation to be 'up here' [raises his hand above his head], to go past what *anybody* expects. The great thing about animation is that you can do things you can't do in live-action, such as make a change from one attitude or character to the next three frames, and you can make it look completely effortless. That makes it possible to heighten a performance."

As Goldberg worked on *Aladdin*, he found himself drawing upon his many early influences, including Al Hirschfeld, the great theatrical caricaturist, and several of Disney's stable of vintage animators. "Al was a major influence on the Genie's design, because he has such an elegance of style and a great way of presenting caricature—very elegant and stylized. He really works at it to make it look easy, but it's not just a question of being able to put down a swoop and there it is.

Scene Photo Copyright 1992 The Walt Disney Company

Robin Williams lends his improvisational talents to the Genie and the film's on-camera narrator, a peddler.

"I was also influenced by [Disney animators] Freddie Moore and Ward Kimball. People might say their stuff was kind of floppy and rubbery, but it had such great exuberance and spirit. Part of that exuberance was because it was pared down to its essentials. A leg line would lead into a shoe, which would lead up the other leg—the same kind of elegance as in a Hirschfeld drawing. They had a great deal of freedom of movement in their animation because their shapes were so simplified, so they didn't feel constrained by distorting them. They would do things with them that were based on curves or squishy shapes, and it gave a great liveliness to what they did."

Goldberg also has praise for *Aladdin* production designer Richard Vander Wende, whose pre-production work for the film also helped define the Genie's look. "His backgrounds were very 'Hollywood curvaceous,' if you know what I mean; kind of 'Hollywood Arabia'—cartoony shapes, but rendered realistically. I wanted a set of characters that would fit into that environ-

(continued on page 66)

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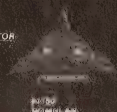

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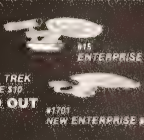

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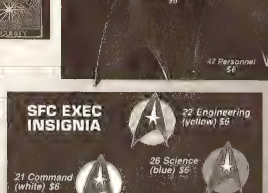

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ANIMATED BARBARIAN

By DREW BITTNER

Robert E. Howard's savage hero, Conan, gets cleaned up for toon TV.

Robert E. Howard's most famous creation, that untamed barbarian named Conan, won't be quite so savage this fall. He'll be kind of well, *calm* as Sunbow Productions' *Conan the Adventurer* airs in syndication.

Using a character noted for often graphic violence in a children's program is a bold move. Sunbow, whose output includes *G.I. Joe*, *Transformers*, *My Little Pony* and *Bucky O'Hare*, steps into heroic fantasy with this project, surprising even the people who worked to make it a reality.

"We're changing the focus from the movies and comic books," says Carole Weitzman, Sunbow's Vice President of Production. "He's not the same age—he's about 19 and is a little more humorous, not quite as grim as he is elsewhere. He's not Conan the Comedian, but he is more naive, less worldly, less hardened."

Story editor Christy Marx was delighted with the opportunity to work on this new series: "Sunbow said, 'We're getting started on this project called *Conan the Adventurer*, and I thought to myself, 'They're out of their minds!' But then, I knew we *would* find a way to do it."

"We spent endless hours discussing how to take a character known as a barbarian and translate him into a show for kids," Weitzman reveals. "Our company doesn't just buy licensed properties and throw them into syndication; we can't do that. We have creative directors and consultants who establish a show's tone. I didn't know the character, apart from the movies, but we got top-notch people like Christy Marx, who *did* know Conan, and they took the concept and made it work."

Marx helped guide this translation through its many stages, starting off by a return to the source: She bought everything Robert E. Howard ever wrote about his barbaric hero.

"I read only Howard's material, or stories that had his name in front of everyone else's," she says. "Howard was my inspiration, the one real source I consulted for this character. Then, I started paring away all the things you *can't* do in animation, and found I had a big, brawny, hard-drinking barbarian who *can't* fight, drink or swear. He can't steal unless it's for a good cause, and he has a real big sword he can't use, to boot! Well, he can't use it against anything human or remotely human-looking. We get around that by having things glow and go poof—magic instead of blood and gore."

As in the original Conan tales, the young adventurer teams with various heroic allies. They include Zula, a black warrior with whom Conan escapes slavery; he becomes Conan's closet pal. Needle, a chatty little phoenix, also helps the Cimmerian youth, while sea-faring Snagg, Falkenar the archer, the sorcerous Greywolf and the beautiful Jezmine round out Conan's friends.

He'll need all the friends he can get when he faces enemies like Wrath-Amon (a variation of Thoth-Amon), his zombie servant Skulkur, the demonic Windfang, Mesmira the sorceress, the snake-like Dregs and Zula's evil cousin, Gorah.

"I originally wanted Conan to be a real loner, because that's what he is in the books," Marx says. "Unfortunately, that doesn't play very well when you have to create a toy line and have character interaction. Hasbro [owner of Conan toy rights] knew they wanted three or four specific kinds of characters, like Zula—it's odd they chose that name, since the last Zula anybody saw was Grace Jones [in *Conan the Destroyer*], but that's how it is. Zula would be his constant companion that's the *Lethal Weapon* influence.

"They wanted a Viking character [Snagg] and Falkenar, and they liked the good magician [Greywolf]. I was determined to have at least one strong female character. I could have used Valeria, since she wasn't excluded from the license like Red Sonja, but we were doing a new batch of characters, and I created Jezmine instead.

"I created [the fledgling phoenix] Needle to play off Conan when he was alone, but everybody fell in love with this guy. I borrowed the phoenix motif

from Howard, who has Conan encountering a phoenix much later in life—I just slid that up to his career's beginning instead of toward the end."

In all, Conan has quite a gang of friends and allies. However, they won't all show up every episode. "From an animation point-of-view, the fewer, the better," Marx explains. "What with scheduling times always getting shorter and expenses getting higher, you must keep the group small and focus on character interplay. With any story, you limit how big your group is, because you have to cover them all; if you don't, why include them?"

"Conan won't be running around like Robin Hood with his Merry Men," confirms Weitzman. "Whatever the story requires, he'll be teamed up with someone who suits that situation. He won't be traveling with the same seven folks all the time, but he has people to call on when needed."

In creating the villains, Marx didn't limit herself to Conan's established enemies. "I was going to include Thoth-Amon, but they weren't going to use that name, so we have a different Stygian sorcerer now named Wrath-Amon," Marx says. "For the Dregs, I drew from Howard's other great barbarian hero, King Kull. These guys are all serpent men who, through magic, look human, so whenever Conan uses his magic sword near them, they just disappear."

"We have the star-metal sword to get rid of monsters, but they don't die. There's no lopping off heads in this show. This is just Conan and friends having fun."

Weitzman affirms this opinion. "We care a lot about getting good ac-

tion/adventure writers," she says. "Many people have come to us wanting to write for *Conan*—we've done very well in attracting and recruiting top creative people, not to mention having our great producer [former comics scribe Roger Slifer."

Writing isn't the only aspect of *Conan* receiving attention. Weitzman maintains that this series has been painstakingly drawn, with richly colored backgrounds and a score that wasn't "off the shelf."

"Chase Rucker, a company in Los Angeles, did all the music for us. It's a grand score and doesn't sound like anything being used in animation," says Weitzman. "Also, we tried to establish a different look for *Conan* In *Back O'Hare*, we made the colors very bright, primary and cartoony-looking. Here, the colors are richer, more vibrant and the backgrounds are a little deeper. The artists are using more reds and purples, jewel-tone colors that give it a very classic look. They're painted beautifully, and I think viewers will really be amazed at how spectacular they are."

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Conan Character Licensed by Conan Properties Inc.

The storyline of *Conan the Adventurer* is straightforward. His family and village turned to stone by Wrath-Amon's sorcery, young Conan sets out with his magical star-metal sword to find a way to restore them to life. As he travels, viewers explore Hyboria beside him.

"There's an underlying personal quest to tie these episodes together," Marx explains, "but there's also the larger theme of good versus evil. Battling Wrath-Amon and so on is a more lofty goal, and it really is the more important one in the series. Conan's personal quest could go on for years without ending."

With Conan being a large, muscular guy carrying a sword, comparison to another blade-toting cartoon hero, one reportedly influenced by the original Conan, is almost inevitable.

"He's *not* really a 'He-Man,'" Weitzman asserts. "We took pains to make the show *very* different from *Masters of the Universe*, visually and story-wise. There aren't any parallels, except just the one: He's a big, young man with a sword."

Marx agrees. "In *Conan*, we have the *original*. He-Man was developed as a synthesis of several heroic models—but Conan is the real thing. It's a completely different setting with different characters. I don't see any great similarity between the two, except one time, a writer wanted to throw in a saber-toothed tiger. I had to say no to that. I'm not worried that people will confuse our show with *He Man*."

For Marx, working on the animated

(continued on page 66)

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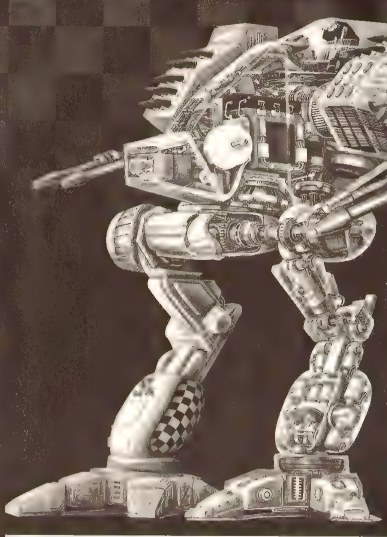

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Conan

(continued from page 64)

Conan series is a pleasure for several reasons. "My first professional break was a story called 'Child of Sorcery,' which I wrote for *Savage Sword of Conan*," she says. "Now that I'm working on this series, I called up [longtime *Conan* comics scribe] Roy Thomas and asked if he would like to do a script for me, sort of repaying him for buying my story years ago. He does the best Conan dialogue—all the other writers refer back to his stuff as 'the real thing,' when they're trying to get Conan's dialogue down.

"Probably the most pleasurable part is that I have so much creative freedom, working in this wonderful world Howard created. I'm trying to keep things as true to their roots as I can, despite the restrictions of animation. Besides, they're paying me to read all those stories and to write stuff I love doing! This is definitely one of the best jobs I've had, in that respect, because I love action/adventure and fantasy."

One of the main problems in creating a series like *Conan* is addressing the issue of violence. Weitzman explains that marketing *Conan* to syndication has been both helped and hurt by the movies' reputation for bloody action.

"As far as the show goes, having the name is a major selling point," she says. "When you go to a station, there are definitely preconceptions you have to overcome: Is it too violent? Can kids watch it? The name is a very strong one, but it's a double-edged sword, with the name recognition and the movies' reputation. With this project, people will assume there's violence until they're reassured that it's perfectly OK for kids. We have techniques to make things less violent and spend a lot of time in development to figure out, with storyboarding and camera angles, how not to spill blood or bash heads."

Presently, Sunbow has committed to 13 episodes with an option to go to 65. "Hasbro won't be bringing out the toys until 1993, so we have plenty of time to live or die by our ratings. All TV is ruled by ratings, and I have no idea if there'll be more episodes." Marx admits. "If the first 13 do well, we'll go ahead and do the next 52, and then figure out where to go."

And there's one sure and certain thing about this animated barbarian.

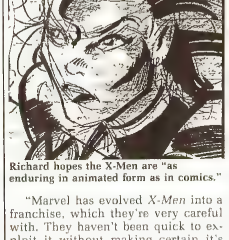
"Conan *won't* be growing up," Carole Weitzman promises. "He can't, really, because then we have to move him closer to the way he is in the movies. You can always be young in animation and that's just how Conan will be—young!" CS

X-Men

(continued from page 40)

where they're re-building the Sentinels.

"At this point, we haven't taken any stories directly from the comics," he notes, "but we've certainly taken comics situations and story ideas and explored them. It has a *Dirty Dozen*-ish quality of all these diverse characters thrown together, with every reason to work together for the same end. Any time you have this situation, you're in for interesting conflicts, humor and great stories.



Richard hopes the X-Men are "as enduring in animated form as in comics."

"Marvel has evolved *X-Men* into a franchise, which they're very careful with. They haven't been quick to exploit it without making certain it's something that will be cared for and done properly. Hopefully, this will be as enduring in animated form as in the comic book," he says optimistically. "I know that sounds audacious, but we feel it can be. It has depth and won't be a flash-in-the-pan."

Not only did the producer read comics as a kid, "I read *X-Men*! Even as a teenager and young adult, I found them fascinating. Lately, my sense of comics is that they've gotten a little leaner in story and fatter on action and visuals," he declares. "I find the stories aren't as rich as they used to be. Still, I know many adults who read them and won't admit it."

Winston Richard is clearly proud of the animated *X-Men*. "We've set out to make the best cartoon series we can, while staying true to the original material. As far as we can see, we're right on target. I think *X-Men* will combine the best of both worlds in animation and comics. In a series of action-filled adventure, we'll have depth with uniquely different characters. It'll have humor, heart and excitement," he promises, "as well as many interesting visuals." CS

Aladdin

(continued from page 56)

ment, so I went for curvy rather than angular. Richard and I were on the same wavelength in terms of knowing that if you had a certain sensitivity to what he was doing as far as the backgrounds, then you could design certain characters that would actually work [in those environments].

"The other thing [that influenced my work on *Aladdin*] was having done many commercials in my career that had kind of a post-UPA graphic design look. I got to a point where I wanted to do something round and curvy as a complete change of pace, to see how it would work. It seemed like this was the film to make a play for curves. When the lead animators jumped on the project after their stint on *Beauty & the Beast*, we all tried to rally together to capture this same curved spirit in terms of the character designs—and not just the Genie. The Genie represented the wildest end of the universe, with maybe Aladdin representing the most conservative. Some of the other characters fell on one side or the other, in between."

Is he satisfied with the final product? "I have wonderful feelings about the film," offers Goldberg. "It's beautifully art-directed, one of the most handsome pictures Disney has ever done, and it's certainly one of the funniest. Once we started getting takes in from Robin and Gilbert [Gottfried, who voices the sarcastic parrot Iago], we were getting a brand of humor that hasn't been seen in Disney films: Gut-level, uproariously funny, not safe or sanitized. It's to Robin's credit that he could come up with so much material that's G-rated and still have it be as bloodily funny as it is."

The conversation turns to audience expectations, a subject Eric Goldberg seems prepared to discuss in light of the tremendous success of the studio's *Little Mermaid* and *Beauty & the Beast*. "I would be telling a lie if I said I didn't think those other financial factors came into it," he admits. "I would love to see this film be a success, because if it is, then [the studio] might say, 'Hey, let's try a few more different things [in our next movie]. Let's try a few things that are maybe off the beaten track, and maybe they'll be successful, too.'

"I would love *Aladdin* to be a critical and financial success, because it opens the door for more artistic freedom in the kinds of things we can do at Disney, and it broadens people's expectations of what Disney artists are capable of. They won't put Disney artists in a box quite so much as they might if we keep turning out the same kinds of films year after year." CS

COMICS REPORTER

COMICS screen

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script; D: director; P: producer; C: creator; AN: animated. LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; MWS: Murakami Wolf Swenson; RB: Rankin Bass; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Ann: Amblin; FF: Fantasmok Films. **Also, all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. [Info as of 9/11/92]

Addams Family. Sequel. PP. AN series. ABC. HB.

❑ **Ace of the Newsreels.** Film. S: Pam Hickey, Dennys McCoy.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Lofficier.

❑ **Aladdin.** AN film. WD. P/D/S: Ron Clements, John Musker. Nov. (see article)

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov. S. Daniel.

Alice in Wonderland. TV series. Disney Channel.

❑ **ALIENS vs. Predator.** Film. Dark Horse/Fox.

The American. Film. P: Joel Silver

Animaniacs. AN syn TV. WB/AM. Fall '93.

❑ **Annie.** Film. *Annie & the Castle of Terror.* D: Lewis Gilbert. Warbucks: Patrick Stewart. Col. To film Spring '93. Stage musical sequel. *Annie Warbucks.* Touring. C: Charnin, Meehan, Strouse

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. D: J. Schumacher. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Bad Baby. AN TV. Imag.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

Barbie. Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel.

❑ **Batman.** AN series. Fox. *Batman Returns* on video.

❑ **Battletoads.** AN TV pilot. DIC. Bohbot. Thanksgiving.

❑ **Beakman's World.** Syn LA series. Based on *You Can with Beakman.* Col. Now airing.

Beyond the Yellow Dragons. AN film. Fox/HB. '93.

❑ **The Black Cat.** Film. Sean Young. D: John Paragon.

Blackhawk. Film. Am. S: Dan Aykroyd.

Blackman. Film. C: Damon & Keenan Ivory Wayans.

❑ **Black Panther.** Film. W/Wesley Snipes. D: John Singleton. P: Brad Weston, Bob Beitcher. Filming *may* start January. Col.

❑ **Blade.** Film

Blinky Bill. Australian AN film. P: Yoram Gross. '92.

Blondie. Film. WB. P: Joel Silver.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

Boogiemanland. AN. Fox.

Brave Little Toaster. AN film sequel. Hyperion.

Bugs Bunny. *Termite Terrace.* LA/AN film. *Plucky Duck.* AN TV spin-off.

Casper. Film. Am.

Charlie Chan. Film.

Chicken Man. AN spoof.

Classics Illustrated. AN series. DIC.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

❑ **Conan.** *Conan the Adventurer.* Syn AN series. (see article)

Concrete. Film. S: (D) L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Tim Burton.

❑ **The Crow.** Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyas. P: Ed Pressman. W/Brandon Lee.

Crusader Rabbit. New AN series. In development. Fox.

Cyberpunk. Film. S: Steve Roberts. Imagination Factory.

Dan Dare. TV series.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W/D: P.R. Cable.

Deathlok. Film.

❑ **Dennis the Menace.** Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Nick Castle. W/Walter Matthau, Chris Lloyd, Lea Thompson. WB. Summer '93. *Dennis the Musical.* S: E. Chambers. Music: Jeff Church. Lyrics. R. Enquist. Chambers.

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN series. In development. Fox.

❑ **Dr. Giggles.** Film U. Fall. (see article)

Dr. Off. Film. Black superhero spoof. P: Tim Reid.

❑ **Dr. Strange.** Film. D: Roman Coppola. P: F. Coppola.

Duckman. AN. C: Everett Peck. Klasky Csupo.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. PP.

Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. FF.

Family Dog. AN series. Am/Nel. Debut delayed.

Fantastic Four. Film. EP: Stan Lee. D: Max Kleven. Neue Constantin Film.

❑ **Fearless Fosdick.** AN film. Nel.

❑ **The Flintstones.** Film. Fred: John Goodman. D: R. Donner? U/Am. AN TV film. *I Yabba-Yabba-Doo.* Pebbles & Bamm-Bamm marry. Feb. ABC. AN TV sequel. (Pebbles has twins).

❑ **G.I. Joe.** Film. SVD: Sheldon Lettich. P: Anthony & John Gentile. Martin Abrams. Gene Kirkwood. WB.

❑ **The Green Falcon.** TV. Am. C: Mick Garris.

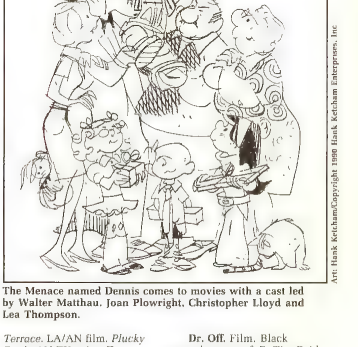
The Green Hornet. Film. S: D. Mancini. P: D. Kirschner. U.

Gus & Grizzard. AN pilot. C: Gary K. Wolf. Nel. CBS.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper, J. Rosenthal.

❑ **Human Target.** Dead.

❑ **The Incredible Hulk.** TV



Art: Hank Ketcham/Copyright 1988 Hank Ketcham Enterprises, Inc.

The Menace named Dennis comes to movies with a cast led by Walter Matthau. Joan Plowright, Christopher Lloyd and Lea Thompson.

The Phantom Walks?

Director Simon Wincer was once thought to have the inside track on helming the long-anticipated film version of Lee Falk's ghost who walks, *The Phantom*. But Wincer, during lensing of the boy and his killer whale epic *Free Willy*, concedes that while he still has his hand on the pulse of the proposed film, he's basically on the outside looking in.

"I was tied to the project for a long time," says Wincer, who's also on the cusp to direct *Return to Lonesome Dove*, the sequel to the hit Western TV mini-series, "but it appears that the game has changed a bit. I was involved for years developing that project, and *nothing* ever came of it. Now the project is over at Paramount and I haven't heard from anybody over there. I guess if they're still interested in my doing it, they'll call."

Wincer, who notes that *Phantom* creator Lee Falk and he have met a number of times and that Falk is "real keen to have me do it," offers his own take on how *The Phantom* should grace movie screens.

"I've always felt that for *The Phantom* to work as a movie it had to be done like the comic strip character: as a period piece rather than something contemporary. I'm still very interested in doing it. We'll just have to wait and see what happens next."

—Marc Shapiro

movie revival? (see item)

❑ **Iron Man.** Film.
Jo Jo. Film. P: Lee Caplin. S: Mike Chapman.
Jonny Quest. AN TV movie. HB. X-Mas?
Judge Dredd. Film.

❑ **Kings in Disguise.** Film. Dark Horse.
Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.
Lucky Luke. TV series. Terence Hill. SB Comm.

❑ **Mai the Psychic Girl.** Film. D: Tim Burton. S: L. Wilson, C. Thompson. P: Burton, Wilson, D. Di Novi. W. Hill. Carolco's financial problems may delay.
Mandrake. Film.
The Mask. Film. New Line.

❑ **The Men in Black.** Film. Col. P: Walter Parkes, Laurie McDonald.

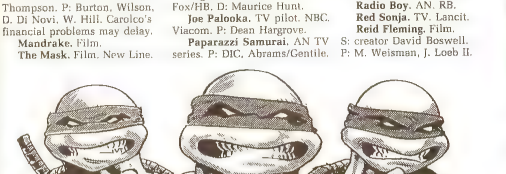
❑ **The Meteor Man.** Film. S/D. R. Townsend. MGM. March.

❑ **Mr. Magoo.** Film. P: Steven Spielberg. Am/WB.
Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.
Monster in My Pocket. AN. HB. ABC. S: Glenn Leopold.
Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.
Neil the Horse. AN/LA.
Ninja High School. AN video. U.K. Sun Planning.
Pagemaster. AN film. Fox/HB. D: Maurice Hunt.
Joe Palooka. TV pilot. NBC. Viacom. P: Dean Hargrove.
Paparazzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.
Peanuts. AN TV & film.

❑ **The Phantom.** Film. PP. P: B. Sherlock, P. Sjoquist, J. Torv. R. Price. S: K. Shadie. C: Lee Falk, con. D: Simon Wincer. (see item)
Pico & Columbus. AN film. Bavaria Film.
Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: Larry Wilson. Summer '93.
The Prince & the Goblin. AN film. Easter '93.
Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner. Constantin Film. P: B. Eichinger, J. Gorman.
Radio Boy. AN. RB.
Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.
Reid Fleming. Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

As *The Black Panther, New Jack City*'s **Wesley Snipes may rule a comics-born land.**

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver. J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.
RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D).
Roger Rabbit. New AN short "Trail Mix Up." WD.
Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.
The Saint. Film. S: Terry Hayes. D: Renny Harlin. P: Robert Evans. PP.
Sandman. Film.
Scooby Doo. Film. WB.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have wrapped another movie.

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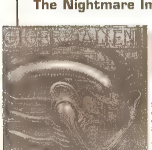
The Man With The Nightmare Imagination



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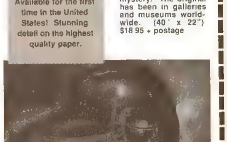

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Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Kabukiman. AN series. Troma. DIC.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. U.

❑ **The She-Hulk.** Film. S/D: Larry Cohen. In limbo.

The Silver Surfer. Film. EP: Stan Lee. Constantin Film.

Speed Racer. AN TV series. MWS. Fall '93 bow.

❑ **Spider-Man.** Film. D: Jim Cameron. Studio TBA. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman. Music: K. Herrmann. EP: Stan Lee. D: J. Nash, J. Calamari.

Starwatcher. AN film. P: Alain Guiot/Videosystem. S: Moebius & J. Fryszman. D: Moebius. Keith Ingham. PP.

Superman. *Superman: The New Movie.* S: Mark Jones & Cary Bates. To lense in FL.

❑ **Super Mario Bros.** LA film. S: Barry Morrow. D: Rocky Morton, Annabel Jankel. Cast: Bob Hoskins, Dennis Hopper, Fisher Stevens, Samantha Mathis. Out summer '93.

Tales from the Hart. TV. P: Aaron Spelling.

❑ **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** LA sequel. March '93. S/D: Stuart T. Gillard. W/Paige Turco, Elias Koteas. AN series. CBS, Syn.

❑ **Terry & the Pirates.** TV. P: Ben Melniker, Michael Uslan.

Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi.

Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman. Spring '93.

Toxic Crusaders. LA film. Troma/New Line. Summer '93.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones. P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.

Valentina. TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.

Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.

V for Vendetta. Film. WB.

Watchmen. Film.

We're Back. AN film. Am/U. Fall '93. S: Patrick Shanley.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

Wild Cards. Film. Disney. S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.

Wizard of Id. Film. Cinergi.

❑ **The X-Men.** AN TV series. Fox. Fall. Marvel/Saban. (see article)

Zen. Film. AN series.

Zorro. Film. D: Steven Spielberg. Zorro: Andy Garcia. S: Nancy Larson. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. In development. Nel. Broadway musical. P: Fox, Nederlander.

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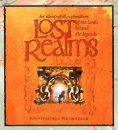

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Highlighted by an eye-catching, holo-grafx cover, **Hulk #400** will be hot! **Recommended!**

	Reg.	/Sale
Hulk 400 (64 pages)	$2.50	1.95
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Contains 32 full color Hulk posters by McFarlane, Byrne, Kieth & more!

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Dark Horse & Valiant unite to produce the ultimate 2-issue battle! In the future of 4001, an even deadlier Predator hunts for the most worthy human opponent - Magnus, Robot Fighter! **Red Hot!**

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